YOUTH TALKS

Your Views
Your Ideas
Your Future

FINAL REPORT

BC Youth

YOUTH TALKS:
YOUR VIEWS, YOUR IDEAS
YOUR FUTURE

A report summarizing
the views of youth
attending the Youth Talks forums
May 1992

B.C. Youth Council
July 1992

93-01373/

Copyright, 1992, B.C. Youth Council

Candian Cataloguing in Publication Data
British Columbia Youth Council
Youth talks: your views, your ideas, your future

ISBN 0-7726-1639-6

1. Youth - British Columbia - Attitudes. 2.
British Columbia - Social conditions - 1945 -
I. British Columbia Youth Council

HQ799.C32B77 1992 305.23'5'09711 C92-092333-X

For further information regarding this report, please contact:

Joan Mason
Administrator
B.C. Youth Council
7th Floor, 1483 Douglas Street
Victoria, B.C. V8W 3K4
Phone: (604) 387-9167
Fax: (604) 387-9142

Copies of this publication are available in public, secondary school, college, university and institute libraries in British Columbia.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS 7
COUNCIL PRIORITIES 1992-93 15
METHODOLOGY 19
YOUTH ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS 23
- INTRODUCTION 23
- SUBSTANCE ABUSE 24
- PHYSICAL HEALTH 29
- MENTAL HEALTH 36
- ABUSE 41
- CRIME 45
- RACISM AND MULTICULTURALISM 50
- CONCLUSION 55

EDUCATION AND SCHOOL DROPOUTS 57
- INTRODUCTION 57
- CURRICULUM 59
- TEACHING AND LEARNING 65
- SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT 71
- SUPPORT PROGRAMS AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT 76

RECREATION/LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES 81
- INTRODUCTION 81
- PROGRAMING AND SERVICES 83
- COMMUNITY AND YOUTH INVOLVEMENT 91

NOTES 95
PARTICIPANT ANALYSIS 99
PARTICIPANT EVALUATION 103

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The eight youth forums could not have been possible without the dedication, hard work and creative ideas of several contributors. The B.C. Youth Council would like to thank the following individuals and organizations:

Forston Tylor, a co-operative education student from Simon Fraser University, was a key player in the coordination of the eight forums, and assisted the writing of the final report;

Terry Worobetz, a co-operative education student from the University of Victoria, who contributed greatly to planning of the youth forums;

Joan Mason and Linda Taylor, the Administrative staff of the Council, for their assistance and long hours in supervising and carrying out the many aspects of the forum project;

The members of the Steering Committee: Frank Roemer of the B.C. Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association; Dave Williams of the Ministry of Education; Alan Strickland and Jan Brocke of the Ministry of Advanced Education; Stacy Wilson, Maryke De Zwager, Dean Crawford and Kathy Nelson of the B.C. Youth Council.

Shawn Robbins and Alan Strickland of the Public Affairs Branch of the Ministry of Advanced Education for their assistance with the distribution of news releases and advertising;

Colleges, school districts and private organizations for making their facilities available at minimal cost;

The numerous volunteers who contributed their time to facilitate the small group sessions;

The media, for their assistance in publicizing the forum(s) in their communities; and

The host of individuals and youth groups, who helped publicize the forums and assisted young people in attending the forum in their communities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on the positive response that the B.C. Youth Council received to its organization of the Canadian Unity Forums held during the summer of 1991, the Council decided to organize and sponsor a similar series of forums entitled, *Youth Talks: Your Views, Your Ideas, Your Future*. The main goals of the forums were to:

- seek input from youth on the issues that they felt were important
- obtain advice on issues of school dropout and recreation opportunities
- stimulate interest in the B.C. Youth Council and its regional committees
- give both the B.C. Youth Council and its regional committees a focus for their activities; and
- empower youth to address their concerns at a local level

Eight communities around the province were chosen to ensure that the economic, regional, and ethnic diversity of the youth of British Columbia were represented. These locations were: Ft. St. John, Chilliwack, Kelowna, Nanaimo, Cranbrook, Prince George, Prince Rupert and Vancouver. The first forum was held on May 4; others followed throughout May.

The format of the day consisted of a combination of small (8-10 participants) and large group sessions, which were all facilitated by youth. Following an introduction by the regional member(s) of the B.C. Youth Council, participants were assigned to small groups and asked to identify the top five critical issues or concerns of youth in their community. Each group was also asked to present concrete recommendations to the Youth Council and government for overcoming these problems.

The afternoon session had a similar format, but participants were asked to address specific questions relating to either education and school dropouts or recreation and leisure opportunities for youth. In both the morning and afternoon sessions, representatives from each small group presented their groups' findings and recommendations to all forum participants, who had an opportunity to ask question or comment on the group presentations.

This report discusses the six most commonly raised issues. Furthermore, it presents both the issues and recommendations put forward by the youth participants related to education and school dropout, and recreation and leisure opportunities for youth.

YOUTH ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

Participants identified these six issues as the most important and pressing amongst youth in British Columbia:

- Substance Abuse
- Physical Health
- Mental Health
- Abuse
- Crime
- Racism and Multiculturalism

By far the most frequently mentioned issue was alcohol and drug abuse. Many of the participants felt that a combination of boredom, relatively easy access to drugs and/or alcohol and limited support services, including counselling, has caused a rise in the use of alcohol and drugs. Increased levels of education, counselling and community based resources were considered basic first steps.

Physical Health was the second most popular topic of discussion, alongside Mental Health. Most of the discussion focussed on the area of sexuality, including sex education, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), birth control, and teenage pregnancy. Health was recognized by youth as directly impacting on their ability to function effectively both in the classroom and their community. The solutions offered included: extensive in-school education on all aspects of health, greater level of resources for young mothers and improved levels of communication between parents and youth.

Mental Health encompasses several related issues raised by youth: loneliness, stress, low self-esteem, problems handling peer pressure, powerlessness and suicide. Some youth, especially those who feel different in some way, find it difficult to interact and communicate with their school peers and their families. Awareness programs, counselling, support services for families in crisis, more phone-in crisis lines and peer counselling were recommended. Any program has to include youth and families in the development and implementation process.

It was apparent from the six of eight forums in which abuse was discussed, how aware youth are about the issues surrounding abuse, rape and sexual harassment. Youth recognized that abuse is directed at a range of differing individuals and groups, and that the impact of such abuse often results in a myriad of problems. Increased community involvement and awareness through education, support groups, crisis lines and safe houses for victims of abuse, were considered by many as the first step in combatting abuse.

Crime concerned many youth at the forums, particularly since youth are both the most common perpetrators and victims of criminal acts. Poverty, lack of options, discrimination toward immigrant youth, the glamorizing of crime and violence throughout the media, and lack of caring were identified as contributing factors to crime. Participants recommended recreational activities to direct youth away from crime, and a greater level of education of youth, teachers,

parents and counsellors about the issues surrounding crime.

Racism and prejudice are far more prevalent than most people know or are willing to admit, said participants. They viewed multiculturalism as a positive contribution to our society. Youth identified a lack of understanding and appreciation of other peoples as the underlying cause of racism. Many felt that greater levels of education, including student exchanges and multicultural-based education courses would be a first step.

EDUCATION AND SCHOOL DROPOUTS

Those youth who participated in the area of education and school dropout identified themes similar to those raised in the morning. Some of the concerns they had about education were:

- boring and routine + classes;
- courses lack relevance;
- students feel uncared for;
- lack of student involvement; and
- poor communication between youth and their schools.

Participants had a wealth of ideas when asked to visualize their ideal school. They wanted to see:

- more career preparation and information courses;
- increased life skills training;
- improved sexual education courses;
- greater parent involvement and awareness;
- students making learning choices; and
- greater student involvement in school decision-making.

RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

Youth had many of the same concerns about recreation. Many felt that there were not enough appealing recreational opportunities in their communities. The programs offered had frequently been designed without their input and did not meet their needs. They recommended:

- establishing programs promoting responsibility and self esteem;
- considering community-based youth centres;
- increased access to existing recreation facilities; and
- formation of youth advisory committees to municipalities.

Youth are looking for an opportunity to be active and involved in their communities. They want to share in the decision-making about the issues which affect them. They are unhappy about the perceptions many adults have of them, and would like to develop open and trusting relationships with their parents, teachers, and community members.

Council members, facilitators and staff were pleased with the enthusiasm, insight and frankness that youth brought to all the forums. The youth of B.C. are very aware of the problems that they face on a daily basis. More importantly, they are capable of offering solutions to these problems.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

YOUTH ISSUES

Substance Abuse

1.01 Current provisions in the Liquor Control and Licencing Act and regulations restricting "lifestyle" advertising of alcohol should be extended. Manufacturers should be required to include health promotion advertising (responsible use, abstinence during pregnancy, designated driver, etc.) as a portion of their advertising.

1.02 The provincial TRYLINE, which refers youth and adults to alcohol and drug prevention and treatment services in the community, should be better publicized with young people.

1.03 The Alcohol and Drug Programs' (Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors) School-Based Prevention Project should be extended to all secondary schools and should receive ongoing financial support.

1.04 The provisions of the Liquor Control and Licencing Act with regard to penalties for the purchase of liquor for minors and sale to minors should be strengthened.

Physical Health

1.05 The goals and activities of the Healthy Schools Project (an initiative of the Office of Health Promotion, Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors) should be implemented in all schools in British Columbia.

1.06 Youth members (19 - 24) should be appointed to all regional health councils, and input sought from those under 19 on their issues and suggestions for programs and services.

1.07 Condom vending machines should be installed in both male and female washrooms in secondary schools throughout British Columbia.

Mental Health

1.08 The provincial government should close existing gaps between programs and services so that suicide prevention programs, grief support groups, and mental health counselling are available to youth in every region of the province.

Abuse

1.09 Support should be given to the creation of support groups, crisis lines, and transition houses for the victims of abuse and their families in all regions of the province. Counselling services should be available to children and youth who witness spousal abuse.

1.10 Treatment of sex-offenders must be given priority during their prison term. In particular, treatment programs for adolescent offenders should be created. Ongoing research is needed to develop more effective treatment programs.

Crime

1.11 Police departments should establish liaison agreements with local elementary and secondary schools, recreation centres and community groups, and become key participants in the development and delivery of preventive programs dealing with youth crime, criminal gang activity, substance abuse, abuse and related isues.

1.12 Youth poverty should be addressed by ensuring that preventive services are available to families so that young people can remain at home in a stable environment, and by ensuring that adequate financial and emotional support is given to young people for whom living at home is not a viable alternative.

1.13 Young offenders should be encouraged or required to contribute their time (perhaps as a portion of their community service) to classroom discussions.

Racism and Multiculturalism

1.14 The Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology should ensure that cross-cultural communications training is incorporated into the education of police, health care professionals, school counsellors, and social service professionals.

1.15 The Government of British Columbia should ensure that English as a Second Language and immigrant services are available promptly to immigrant youth and their families.

1.16 The provincial government, in cooperation with other levels of government, should support the development of programs and events that promote and enhance tolerance and understanding of multiculturalism in B.C.

Overall Recommendations

1.17 Municipalities and school districts should collaborate to produce directories of youth services available in the community and wallet-size cards listing emergency services to be provided to all secondary students.

1.18 Preventive services in support of families, including counselling and training in communication and parenting skills, should be incorporated into the mandate of the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Health and given funding.

1.19 All levels of government should ensure that councils, advisory committees and other groups advising on issues affecting young people include representation of youth, and actively seek youth input as part of any community consultations.

1.20 Provincial governments should act as a model for other levels of government by ensuring that youth participation is invited on all task forces, committees, and councils where recommendations are being made which affect youth, and by ensuring that effective consultation processes are put in place to gather youth views on the issues under consideration.

EDUCATION

Curriculum

2.01 Career education should be an essential part of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum. Students should be given opportunities to learn about a wide range of careers, to identify their interests and aptitudes, to learn skills of career planning, and to explore the suitability of various career options.

2.02 Students should have the opportunity to find out more about careers that interest them in their class assignments and projects.

2.03 Cooperative education, career preparation and Passport to Apprenticeship programs, offered in partnership with business, industry and post-secondary institutions should be available to students in all secondary schools. All students should receive credit for work experience toward their secondary school diploma.

2.04 Schools should allow students to take community or post-secondary courses for elective credit. In some cases, students should also be able to acquire college or university credit for these courses.

2.05 Canadian and multicultural studies should form an integral component of the K - 12 humanities strand. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that courses in Canadian history and culture reflect the contributions of First Nations and immigrant groups.

2.06 Schools should celebrate the cultural heritage of their students through school assemblies, menus in school cafeterias, projects, and the decor of the school.

2.07 Home-school coordinators and translation services should be available in communities with significant numbers of English as a Second Language families to assist them in understanding the Canadian educational system and dealing with any problems their children have in adapting to school.

2.08 Peer support programs should be established in schools with large numbers of ESL students.

2.09 All school districts should implement the Learning for Living curriculum as quickly as possible preferably in advance of the required implementation dates. Professional development should be available to teachers as an integral component of the implementation process.

2.10 School districts should ensure that all youth have an understanding of the challenges and difficulties of parenthood through experiential exercises.

2.11 Greater emphasis must be placed in schools on developing self-esteem and skills in communication, stress management, conflict management, and problem-solving. Suicide prevention should also be incorporated into the school curriculum.

2.12 Schools should educate children, from kindergarten through to graduation, on physical, sexual, and emotional/verbal abuse. Children should learn what abuse is, what they can do to prevent or reduce the likelihood they might be victimized, and what to do if they experience abuse.

Teaching and Learning

2.13 Students should have the opportunity to learn at their own pace and in different ways based on their own learning style. They should be able to choose from a range of possible learning activities.

2.14 Access to exchange programs should be improved, with greater opportunities created for all students.

2.15 A pilot project should be established to determine the feasibility of extended school days, with flexible hours of attendance.

2.16 University teacher education programs should be updated to prepare teachers for the Year 2000 program, and to increase the amount of practical experience built into the programs.

2.17 Criteria for acceptance into faculties of education should be adjusted to ensure that potential teachers have an interest and aptitude for working with young people.

2.18 School districts, the B.C. Teachers Federation (BCTF), and the Ministry of Education should examine the structure of pay scales for teachers to ensure that new teachers are adequately recompensed.

2.19 School districts, the BCTF, and the Ministry of Education should examine the issues of class size and the possibilities of increasing the use of para-professionals in the classroom, in order to ensure that all students get the individual attention they require.

2.20 Through partnership agreements with business, schools should ensure that all students have regular ongoing access to computers for classroom use and homework assignments.

2.21 Satellite link-ups between schools in different parts of Canada or the world, videodisc and laser disc interactive programs, computer-assisted learning, and other forms of technology should be better utilized in all schools.

School Environment

2.22 Schools should create an increased sense of community amongst its students and staff by implementing policies and activities which give each member of the school the opportunity to know others on a personal basis and feel valued as a contributor to the school. Such activities could include: school conference days, school assemblies, events and activities reflecting the cultural heritage of students, orientation days, buddy systems, teacher advisors and home room periods.

2.23 Extra-curricular activities should be recognized as an important part of the school experience. Cooperative relationships with youth workers in recreation departments should be pursued in order to provide a broader range of extra-curricular activities and to ensure that all students have an opportunity to engage in activities that interest them, and help them develop a healthy and active lifestyle.

2.24 Schools should model a cooperative and participatory style of management by actively involving staff, teachers, parents, and students in the development of rules and procedures, settlement of disputes, purchase of equipment, hours of service and menus in school cafeterias and planning for renovations and new buildings.

2.25 The architecture and decor of schools (new or renovated) should be bright and appealing, should recognize the cultural heritage of the students, provide space for students to carry out peer helping and student government activities, and provide cafeterias and other areas where students can socialize between classes.

Support Programs and Community Involvement

2.26 In cooperation with local health departments, municipal governments, local offices of the Ministries of Health and Social Services and other appropriate agencies, schools should ensure that programs and services related to physical and mental health, and substance abuse services are readily available to youth in their secondary schools.

2.27 Every school district in the province should implement peer counselling programs, especially at the junior and senior secondary level. The Ministry of Education should provide resources for the training, ongoing development, and supervision of these programs.

2.28 All school districts, in cooperation with local health units, Family Services, Planned Parenthood, and other appropriate agencies, should provide flexible educational programs, daycare and support services to assist young parents to complete their schooling.

2.29 School counsellors should have greater access to professional development. Topics dealt with might include career counselling methods, counselling skills updates and current youth issues.

2.30 All schools should become community schools, actively involving parents, businesses, community groups and seniors as learners and resource persons. Parents should be more actively involved as partners in their children's education, especially at the junior and senior secondary level.

2.31 Businesses should implement incentive programs to encourage their student employees to complete school and pursue post-secondary education.

2.32 Police departments should establish liaison agreements with local elementary and secondary schools, and become key participants in the development and delivery of preventive programs related to:

- traffic safety;
- abuse, e.g. self-defence courses, security escorts, self-protection techniques, and community awareness;
- substance abuse, e.g. awareness programs, dry grad programs, and drug-free youth activities; and
- crime prevention.

RECREATION

Programming and Services

3.01 Municipalities should establish youth councils or youth advisory committees which provide advice to parks and recreation departments on youth recreation services including programming, locations, publicity, hours and transportation.

3.02 In cooperation with local health units, substance abuse prevention agencies, and the Ministries of Health and Social Services, youth centres should provide resources such as community health nurses, nutritionists, counselling, outreach services for street youth, immigrant youth, runaways, and abused children, and other services for youth.

3.03 Youth centres should spearhead the development of youth newsletters which would highlight activities and services for youth in the community.

3.04 Municipal councils should work together with youth advisory committees to address the issue of skateboarding in their community. Possible solutions might include construction of skateboard parks and creation of policies which permit skateboarding in designated areas.

3.05 Youth input should be sought on public transit issues to ensure that their transportation needs are met.

Community and Youth Involvement

3.06 Municipalities should lead the way in bringing together schools, non-profit agencies which provide recreation services, and other organizations in order to encourage better collaboration in the provision of youth recreation services.

COUNCIL PRIORITIES 1992-93

With more than 340 participants having attended the Youth Talks forums, it comes as no surprise that this final report contains recommendations which touch on so many areas of the provincial government's jurisdiction. In fact, the recommendations go beyond the jurisdiction of the provincial government to encompass that of municipal and federal governments as well.

Encouraging government to take action on the 57 recommendations made in this report will be the central focus of the B.C. Youth Council's activities over the next year. Having consulted broadly with young people around the province, the council feels it has a mandate to encourage government to take a close look at each of these recommendations.

As with any advisory body, however, the youth council is faced with the dilemma of choosing the issues upon which it will concentrate its energy and resources. Although the council will encourage the various levels of government to take action on all of the recommendations contained in the report, members have decided to put forth a concentrated effort on several key groups of recommendations.

The following recommendations were chosen after discussion among council members themselves, with government officials and Dr. Tom Perry (Minister Responsible for Youth). With respect to education and health-related issues, consideration was also given to changes underway as part of the Ministry of Education's Year 2000 initiatives as well as the recommendations made by the British Columbia Royal Commission on Health Care and Costs.

The recommendations have been grouped together according to issue and are not listed in any order of precedence.

GROUP A: YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

1.06 - Youth members (19-24) should be appointed to all regional health councils, and input sought from those under 19 on their issues and suggestions for programs and services.

1.19 - All levels of government should ensure that councils, advisory committees and other groups advising on issues affecting young people include representation of youth, and actively seek youth input as part of any community consultations.

1.20 - Provincial governments should act as a model for other levels of government by ensuring that youth participation is invited on all task forces, committees, and councils where recommendations are being made which affect youth, and by ensuring that effective consultation processes are put in place to gather youth views on the issues under consideration.

2.24 - Schools should model a cooperative and participatory style of management by actively involving staff, teachers, parents, students in the development of rules and procedures, settlement of disputes, purchase of equipment, hours of service, menus in school cafeterias and planning renovations and new buildings.

3.01 - Municipalities should establish youth councils or youth advisory committees which provide advice to parks and recreation departments on youth recreation services including programming, locations, publicity, hours and transportation.

GROUP B: PREVENTIVE SERVICES

1.08 - The provincial government should close existing gaps between programs and services so that suicide prevention programs, grief support groups, and mental health counselling are available to youth in every region of the province.

1.12 - Youth poverty should be addressed by ensuring that preventive services are available to families so that young people can remain at home in a stable environment, and by ensuring that adequate financial and emotional support is given to young people for whom living at home is not a viable alternative.

1.18 - Preventive services in support of families, including counselling and training in communication and parenting skills, should be incorporated into the mandate of the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Health and given funding.

2.09 - All school districts should implement the Learning for Living curriculum as quickly as possible preferably in advance of the required implementation dates. Professional development should be available to teachers as an integral component of the implementation process.

2.11 - Greater emphasis must be placed in schools on developing self-esteem and skills in communication, stress management, conflict management, and problem solving. Suicide prevention should also be incorporated into the school curriculum.

2.12 - Schools should educate children, from kindergarten through graduation, on physical, sexual, and emotional/verbal abuse. Children should learn what abuse is, what they

can do to prevent or reduce the likelihood they might be victimized, and what to do if they experience abuse.

GROUP C: COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

1.17 - Municipalities and school districts should collaborate to produce directories of youth services available in the community and wallet-size cards listing emergency services to be provided to all secondary students.

2.26 - In cooperation with local health departments, municipal governments, local offices of the Ministries of Health and Social Services and other appropriate agencies, schools should ensure that programs and services related to physical and mental health, and substance abuse services are readily available to youth in their secondary schools.

2.28 - All school districts, in cooperation with health units, Family Services, Planned Parenthood, and other appropriate agencies, should provide flexible educational programs, daycare and support services to assist young parents to complete their schooling.

2.32 - Police departments should establish liaison agreements with local elementary and secondary schools, and become key participants in the development and delivery of preventive programs related to: traffic safety; abuse, e.g. self-defence courses, security escorts, self-protection techniques, and community awareness; substance abuse, e.g. awareness programs, dry grad programs, and drug-free youth activities; and crime prevention.

3.02 - In cooperation with local health units, substance abuse prevention agencies, and the Ministries of Health and Social Services, youth centres should provide resources such as community health nurses, nutritionists, counselling, outreach services for street youth, immigrant youth, runaways, and abused children, and other services for youth.

3.06 - Municipalities should lead the way in bringing together schools and non-profit agencies which provide recreation services, and other organizations, in order to encourage better collaboration in the provision of youth recreation services.

GROUP D: CAREER EDUCATION

2.01 - Career education should be an essential part of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum. Students should be given opportunities to learn about a wide range of careers, to identify their interests and aptitudes, to learn skills of career planning, and to explore the suitability of various career options.

2.02 - Students should have the opportunity to find out more about careers that interest them in their class assignments and projects.

2.03 - Cooperative education, career preparation and Passport to Apprenticeship programs, offered in partnership with business, industry and post-secondary institutions should be available to students in all secondary schools. All students should receive credit for work experience toward their secondary school diploma.

GROUP E: ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

1.15 - The Government of British Columbia should ensure that English as a Second Language and immigrant services are available promptly to immigrant youth and their families.

2.07 - Home-school coordinators and translation services should be available in communities with significant numbers of English as a Second Language families to assist them in understanding the Canadian educational system and dealing with any problems their children have in adapting to school.

2.08 - Peer support programs should be established in schools with large numbers of ESL students.

2.09 - All school districts should implement the Learning for Living curriculum as quickly as possible, preferably in advance of the required implementation dates. Professional development should be available to teachers as an integral component of the implementation process.

METHODOLOGY

PLANNING

Based on the success of the 1991 Canadian Unity forums, the B.C. Youth Council, at their general meeting on February 15,16, 1992, passed a motion to hold a similar series of youth forums. These forums would gather together the ideas and concerns of youth on a range of issues they felt impacted directly on young people in their communities and the province.

A flow chart was developed detailing all the tasks to be completed by project staff.

Planning for the Youth Talks forums was conducted by a Steering Committee consisting of three council members, and representatives of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Advanced Education, and the B.C. Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association.

The forums were open to anyone, however, the target audience was identified as youth between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four. While the advertising and publicity for the forums was directed at youth and the majority of participants came form this age group, a small but significant number of the participants were older and younger. This range in age posed little difficulty for forum facilitators or participants, since many were concerned and interested in discussing a similar set of pressing youth issues.

LOCATIONS & TIMING

Naturally, the Council wanted to involve youth from all parts of the province. A total of eight locations were chosen with the above goal in mind: Ft.St. John, Chilliwack, Kelowna, Nanaimo, Cranbrook, Prince George, Prince Rupert, and Vancouver.

Like last year's forums, the Council and the Steering Committee agreed that colleges and schools would be familiar and non-threatning to a youth audience, and costs could also be kept to a minimum. The exceptions to this were the Vancouver and Prince Rupert forums, in which private organizations donated the necessary facilities.

Timing was also an important consideration. Last year's Unity forums were held during the summer months and resulted in low attendance at several of the forums. Taking this into consideration, both the Council and the Steering Committee agreed to hold this year's forums during the month of May. As a result the attendance figures were noticeably higher in all but one of the Youth Talks forums.

FORMAT AND SCHEDULING

A small group discussion format was established as the basis for the forums. This type of format provided greater opportunities for individuals to have their views heard than most large group processes. As a result, there was little difference between the participation levels of either older or younger participants in the small group format.

The small group process used in the forums consisted of the following steps: individual brainstorming using flip chart paper and felt pens, posting the contributions of each member, clarifying the ideas of each group member, individual voting and tallying of votes, and presenting the group's most iportant ideas to the large group. The most important step was clarification. Each person's ideas were discussed in turn, with the facilitator leading the group through the process. He or she made sure that every member of the group understood the idea that was being put forward. Once all of the ideas had been discussed, the facilitator asked the group to eliminate duplications and group ideas that participants felt were part of a single issue.

Such a format of small groups required, as mentioned above, volunteer facilitators. As attendance was expected to be high, a large number of facilitators would have to be recruited in each area. One hour was spent prior to the commencement of each forum to orient facilitators to the forum process.

Each forum was scheduled to last approximately six hours. Forums would begin at 10:00 AM and conclude around 4:00 PM. This start time was decided upon so as to better allow participants, particularly those commuting long distances, sufficient time to travel to the forums.

OUTLINE OF THE FORUM

Prior to the 10:00 AM commencement of the day long forum, all arriving participants were each assigned to a small group for the morning half of the forum. At this time participants were also provided with a forum kit, which contained information on the B.C. Youth Council and forum materials, including detailed agenda for the day, an outline of the small group process, a Forum Evaluation form, and a Further Comments sheet.

The forum began with an introductory session presented by the council member(s) of the region in which the forum was held. This introduction provided a brief outline on the activities of the B.C. Youth Council and the forum agenda for the day.

Following this, participants went to their small groups. Before starting into work, each group completed one of several ice breaking activities. The idea was to make each group member feel more comfortable

about involving themselves in the discussion process. This type of activity was generally successful and helped those individuals that might be shy or less articulate to be at ease about speaking up.

In the small group session, participants were asked to identify what they thought were the "critical issues and concerns of youth in your community?" They were given approximately sixty minutes to arrive at a list of youth issues and associated solutions. Each small group carefully recorded their views on flip chart paper. This flip chart paper was labelled with the group number and the name of the session, before being collected. This material was later recorded by the moderators in each of their forum reports.

Do to the expected quantity of discussion, each group was asked to prioritize the issues raised into a top five list. These top five issues, along with their relevant solutions, were later presented by each group to the all forum participants. This gave everyone the opportunity to ask questions or make comments about the various presentations.

Similar in format to the morning, the afternoon session asked participants to identify issues and offer solutions. The difference was that discussion centred around two specific areas: education/school dropout and recreation/leisure opportunities for youth. Initially participants were allowed to choose either one of the two topics. However, this resulted in several youth participants choosing one of the topics more out of a desire to be with their friends then because of personal interest. To rectify this problem it was decided to designate participants to either of the two questions; (a similar process to that used in the morning session).

Each group was given approximately one hour and thirty minutes to discuss and answer the questions that were included in either of the two topics. Participants then summarized their discussions and later reported back on their conclusions to the entire forum.

Following the large group session, participants were asked to fill in their evaluations and further comments sheets. As the section on Participant Evaluation demonstrates, a majority of the attendees responded to this questionnaire.

The forum moderator(s) concluded the day by thanking everyone for their participation and positive efforts, and generally concluded the day around 4:00 PM.

Following the closing remarks, both moderator(s) and facilitators remained behind for a debriefing session, which lasted approximately thirty minutes. This gave an opportunity for all to compare and consult with one another on the events of the day. It also allowed forum moderators the chance to ask questions and obtain information on comments, ideas or other contributions which were not presented in the group reports. This also assisted the moderators in completing their forum reports, that were later presented to the Council administrator.

YOUTH ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

INTRODUCTION

From their inception the Youth Talks forums were designed to give participants a high degree of freedom to establish topics for discussion.

During the forum's morning session, the youth participants were asked to discuss any issue or concern that they felt was important in their communities. From this discussion six dominant issues emerged. They were: substance abuse, physical health, mental health, abuse, crime and racism. Education and recreation were also key issues for the young people who attended the forums, but because these issues were the subject of the afternoon sessions, they are not discussed in this section.

Initially, it had been predicted that there would be wide variation in the issues raised and the responses received to both the morning and afternoon discussions. However, substantial agreement on the main issues emerged throughout the forums.

The major difference was in how groups at the various forums expressed these issues and concerns. For some forum participants a particular issue, such as alcohol and drugs, was only one element in the much larger problem of self-respect and peer pressure, whereas others identified substance abuse as a separate and significant issue.

Youth were also quick to point out the high level of interconnection between all of the issues that they raised. They realized that that no one issue could be discussed or addressed without affecting another issue in some way.

Underlying all of the issues were three themes. While not always discussed as separate and distinct issues, communication, self-esteem and empowerment were identified by youth as fundamental to the solution of all of the issues discussed. These ideas are apparent throughout this report.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The issue of substance abuse came out in all eight forums as one of the most dominant areas of concern. Youth were concerned not only with the abuse of alcohol and drugs but also of tobacco and prescription drugs. Substance abuse by adults was a concern it contributes to dysfunctional families, abuse and poverty.

Participants felt that many youth used such substances out of a need to be "cool" and to gain acceptance amongst their peers. Similarly, peer pressure emerged as having a high degree of influence on how and when youth chose to engage in the use of drugs and alcohol.

In 1990, 72.3% of students in Grades 8 to 12 had used alcohol in the year preceding the survey.

26.3% used tobacco, 23.1% cannabis, 12.4% prescription barbituates, and 10.4% hallucinogens.

Cocaine use was reported by 5.7% and 2.4% reported using steroids.

(1990 British Columbia Student Drug Use Survey Summary Report, Alcohol and Drug Program, Ministry of Health)[1]

Participants also said that access to either alcohol or drugs was generally an uncomplicated affair. Individuals wanting these substances could do so either through a known "bootlegger" or dealer in their school, or by asking an adult to make the purchase for them. Many youth commented that they knew how to obtain drugs readily at the ages of 11 to 13.

More than three quarters of Grade 8 adolescents found alcohol "fairly easy" or "very easy" to obtain. Perceived ease of access to drugs increased with increasing grade.

(1990 British Columbia Student Drug Use Survey Summary Report, Alcohol and Drug Program, Ministry of Health)[2]

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AS A COPING MECHANISM

Other groups at the forums felt that youth often began using drugs in order to cope with personal problems such as stress from school, stress resulting from family problems, (e.g. abuse), boredom and loneliness. These personal problems were very important because participants felt that they impacted directly on some of

the underlying themes of discussed elsewhere in this report, including the lack of communication between youth and adults and low self-esteem amongst youth. Drugs provide temporary relief from these personal problems, even if in the long run they cause even more.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND CRIME

Some participants also discussed the intimate connection between drugs and alcohol and criminal activity. This criminal activity included drinking and driving, gang activity, commiting such offences as break and enter to support a drug habit, or dealing in drugs to support themselves and/or their families.

17.5% of students in grades 8 to 12 reported agressive or destructive behavior due to alcohol; 12.1% had been warned by police because of alcohol use.

(1990 British Columbia Student Drug Use Survey Summary Report, Alcohol and Drug Program, Ministry of Health)[3]

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND THE MEDIA

Furthermore, participants saw a society that on the one hand criticized youth for using alcohol and cigarettes, and yet openly condoned and glorified their use through the media. Advertisements continually link alcohol and tobacco use with a lifestyle filled with excitement and good times. In addition, youth are continually being told not to drink or smoke, but watch adults doing both. Youth understandbly felt angered and confused by such blatant hypocrisy.

A reduction in the amount of alcohol and cigarette advertising, and an increase in health promotion advertising that warns of the dangers of alcohol and drug consumption was considered to be a positive step towards changing society's attitude about alcohol and drug use.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND FAMILIES

The impact that these substances had on promoting dysfunctional families was of great concern to the participants. As a result of their own personal experiences or those of friends, participants saw the abuse of alcohol and other drugs by either parents or youth as contributing to the distruction of their family. Their use resulted in domestic violence, abuse, including sexual, physical and/or verbal, and more single parent families.

In turn, these lone parent families were often poorly equipped to handle crisis due the emotional trauma of separation and divorce, the added burdens of family responsibilities and the higher incidence

of poverty. The existing preventive and support services are woefully inadequate in dealing with these problems.

Youth want to remain with their families and communities. They do not want to abandon their families' problems or feel alienated from society. The lack of communication skills between child and parent and the lack of societal support for resolution of problems associated with alcohol and drugs gives many youth few desirable alternatives. Leaving a dysfunctional family may appear to be the only option.

EDUCATION

Education was seen as one of the best means for addressing the issue of use and abuse of alcohol and drugs. The present format of materials and courses available to youth in B.C. is piece meal at best. Youth suggested that a province-wide, school-based compulsory program be developed to deal with substance abuse. This program would not only deal with the legal and physical consequences of using these substances, but the mental and emotional ones as well.

The youth also pointed out the need to involve parents in this type of program. This would both increase awareness on the part of parents, and would serve to facilitate communication between youth and parents.

43% of adolescent drinkers say that their parents do not realize how much they drink.

(1990 British Columbia Student Drug Use Survey Summary Report, Alcohol and Drug Program, Ministry of Health)[4]

COMMUNITY-BASED RESOURCES

The existing drug and alcohol prevention services that are available do not appear sufficient to deal with the present demand, particularly in the smaller communities of B.C. With this in mind more community-based counselling and crisis centres, as well as support groups are needed. These services need to be promoted in such away as to make youth aware that help does exist. A comprehensive body that could connect youth with alcohol and drug services was recommended. This body would also facilitate greater communication between other drug and alcohol programs around the province. The youth recommending this approach seemed completely unaware of the TRYLINE which has just that purpose.

SCHOOL COUNSELLING

Closely associated with this is the need for more schools to adopt

peer counselling programs. Many youth indicated that they would feel more secure in talking with someone their own age.

The present adult school counsellors should be allowed to focus more of their efforts on student counselling, rather than on the broad range of administrative type duties that youth see them engaged in. Furthermore, school counsellors should be given the opportunity for more professional development to ensure that they are up-to-date on youth issues.

Counsellors should be more available in the classroom, so that students have an opportunity to develop a trusting relationship before going to the counsellor with a problem. Throughout the forums, youth repeatedly indicated a need for confidentiality amongst both peer and school counsellors.

ROLE OF POLICE

Cooperation and communication between youth and local police on ways of dealing with substance abuse was viewed as another excellent step. Expansion of dry grad programs and the development of more alcohol and drug-free youth activities was considered to be the possible result of such cooperation. These kinds of efforts would allow both groups to better understand each other's points of view and work towards reaching a common ground.

Stricter laws regarding the sale of alcohol and tobacco were also advocated. Adults who make purchases for minors should receive much harsher penalities. Finally, stricter enforcement and prosecution of those charged with either drinking and driving, or possession or trafficking of illegal drugs was suggested.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.01 Current provisions restricting "lifestyle" advertising of alcohol in the Liquor Control and Licencing Act and regulations should be extended. Manufacturers should be required to include health promotion advertising (responsible use, abstinence during pregnancy, designated driver, etc.) as a portion of their advertising.

1.02 The provincial TRYLINE, which refers youth and adults to alcohol and drug prevention and treatment services in the community, should be better publicized with young people.

1.03 **The Alcohol and Drug Programs' (Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors) School-Based Prevention Project should be extended to all secondary schools and should receive ongoing financial support.**

1.04 **The provisions of the Liquor Control and Licencing Act with regard to penalties for the purchase of liquor for minors and sale to minors should be strengthened.**

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Respecting Who You Are

Students in an isolated village on the coast of British Columbia are concerned about alcohol and drug abuse among young people in their community, and they're using awareness of their cultural heritage to try to do something about it.

With the help of the school principal, students at Bella Bella Secondary School raised enough money to organize an Addictions Awareness Week last November. As part of their fund-raising, the students put together a successful proposal for a $2,000 grant from the High School Grants Program of the Alcohol and Drug Programs Branch of the Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors.

Among the 23 presenters who spoke to students about their personal experiences with drugs and alcohol were heriditary chiefs and elders from the local Heiltzuk people, and Zoe Hopkins, a 17 year old former Bella Bella resident who recently acted in the highly acclaimed Canadian film, Black Robe.

Head Teacher Kelly Brown says the week was "intensely emotional." Grade 11 student Howard Humchitt was so moved by the experience that he spearheaded a plan for a week-long retreat on a remote, uninhabited island off the coast, known to the local Heiltzuk people as Goose Island. During the retreat, students will have a chance to talk with elders and learn more about their cultural heritage.

Brown says the retreat will help students to appreciate what life was like in the community before drugs and alcohol and to gain more respect for themselves and everyone around them. After the retreat, ongoing support will be provided through bi-weekly in-school meetings with student peers and respected people from the community.

For Howard Humchitt, the retreat is a chance for him and his friends to connect with what is really important in their culture. "It's not just the dancing and singing," he explains, "It's respect for the land, the food, and the people."

(Adapted from Health Promotion in Action, Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, Spring 1992)[5]

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Together with the issue of mental health, physical health was the second most popular topic of discussion. Most of the discussion focused on the area of sexuality, including sex education, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), birth control and teenage pregnancy. However, several groups also identified eating disorders as an important health issue for young people. Health was recognized by youth as directly impacting on their ability to function effectively both in the classroom and their coummunity.

SEX EDUCATION

Many youth were concerned about the lack of sex education, particularly in their schools. Some participants indicated that they had received only a few classes in four to five years of high school. Furthermore, they stated that such vital topics as STDs, AIDS, birth control and teenage pregnancy were not dealt with frankly and in detail, if they were discussed at all. Most sex education classes dealt with the physiology and mechanics of sexual functioning, rather than the more emotional topics of sexual feelings and communication with one's partner about sexual expression.

Youth expressed their difficulty in simply talking about sex. Either they were unsure or shy about the issues or they were confused by the emotions and feelings that are a part of the developmental process. Participants were also concerned about youth rushing into sexual relationships because they had been pressured by their peers to lose their virginity and "do it".

47% of females and 42% of males aged 15 - 19 were sexually active, but only 72% of these females and 78% of these males used contraceptives.

(B.C. Alliance Concerned with Early Pregnancy and Parenthood, Spring 1990).[6]

In regards to the sex education they had received, youth felt very strongly about the moralistic and preaching tone of some adults, including teachers, parents and community leaders. Youth made it clear that they do not wish to be taught how to think about their own sexuality. Furthermore, they do not want information being withheld from them by adults who feel they know what is best for youth.

Youth argued that poor communication between adults and youth was also to blame for an inability to solve youth health issues. Participants asserted that adults had not asked or involved youth in developing programs for addressing

health issues. Cases where adults were unwilling to admit to such health problems, or deemed youth unable to effectively discuss such health issues were regularly heard throughout the forums. With this prevailing attitude how could educators, parents and youth hope to tackle this complex and emotionally charged issue?

An increase in education and awareness were seen as effective first steps in solving the problems associated with youth health. Youth argued for a province wide, mandatory sexual education program that not only dealt with the physical but the psychological side of sexuality. This program would have to be on-going and regular, beginning in elementary and continuing through high school. Youth also wanted any sexual education program to be frank, indepth and explicit.

Some forum groups suggested this same program include presentations by individuals that could relate real life experiences and clearly identify the consequences. Drama was also recommended as an avenue for exploring sensitive issues and giving youth an opportunity to rehearse communication skills.

An example combining both approaches is the play "Oh, Baby!" created and performed by young parents from the Young Moms Program at the Greater Victoria YM/YWCA. Performances at local secondary schools were followed by a discussion with the cast members who were teenage parents themselves.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Teenage pregnancy was another important issue identified as part of youth health. Some youth expressed concern about the limited knowledge some young parents had, prior to the birth of a child, of the challenges and difficulties of parenthood. The need to have someone to love, i.e. a baby, and to create a sense of belonging were commmonly cited as reasons young mothers decided to have children. Awareness about alternatives and options, including adoption or abortion, are lacking among pregnant teens.

Live births in 1990 by age of mother:

Age 13	**2**
Age 14	**29**
Age 15	**108**
Age 16	**251**
Age 17	**474**
Age 18	**699**
Age 19	**1,044**

Births to young mothers between 13 and 19 accounted for 5.7% of all live births in B.C. in 1990.

(Vital Statistics and Health Status Indicators, *1990 Annual Report*, Ministry of Health)[7]

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Staging Reality: Young Moms Reveal the Facts

Usually, it's kids who act up, but in the Young Moms program at the Victoria YM/YWCA, moms do the acting up in a play based on their experiences with pregnancy and raising children. The moms, whose average age is 21, are taking their play, "Oh, Baby!" to B.C. high schools to help teens learn the realities of teen pregnancy.

"You think people will stand in line to help you keep and care for your kid," says Dorothea Harris, 22, mother of three, "That's not how it is." A few of the other moms, Megan, Jae, Janine and Connie, quickly agree. "It's not the fantasy we're led to believe in," says Janine, mother of four and veteran of the group.

The group called upon Victoria actress Donna Tunney to help them write a script, and worked with Director Morgan Gadd from the University of Victoria's Theatre Department.

"This was a real eye-opener for me," says Donna, who taped the moms' stories, then wrote the script. "I was intimidated by them at first because they had so much more experience than me, and I'm older."

Although most of them had never set foot on stage, the young mothers wanted to tell their story. "Everyone tells you how big a responsibility kids are, but you don't believe it until you live it," says Janine. "We want to help people live it through us."

The play has been videotaped for students outside Victoria, as well as performed on stage for Victoria area audiences.

(Adapted from B.C. Youth, Winter 90/91).[8]

There was also concern over the accessibility to day care facilities and support services for young mothers seeking to complete their high school diploma. Young mothers cope with incredible pressures which may make regular full-time school attendance difficult. Flexible programs and nearby daycare are essential to assist young mothers in completing school. While such programs were available in the Lower Mainland, they were virtually nonexistant in the smaller communities of B.C.

Youth wanted to see an expansion of already existing teen mother programs to all regions of the province. These would include both in-school day care programs and support services such as counselling, flexible schooling, and support for learning skills in household management and parenting.

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

Participants felt that many youth were at risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease. AIDS has received a lot of media attention, but there are still young people who are not aware of the risk of being infected and how to protect themselves. Many more youth are ignorant of other sexually transmitted diseases.

Average percent of correct responses on AIDS knowledge test:

Street youth	**75%**
Grade 11 students	**67%**
Dropouts	**77%**
College/University students	**70%**

(*Street Youth and AIDS*, Social Program Evaluation Group, Queen's University at Kingston, 1989)[9]

In addition, both young men and women find it difficult to talk to a sexual partner about his/her sexual history, or to discuss birth control and disease prevention. They may be embarrassed to bring condoms along on a date, for fear that their partners may think that they are "expecting to do it", and are, therefore, "easy".

Average percent of correct responses on STDs knowledge test:

Street youth	**76%**
Grade 11 students	**56%**
Dropouts	**70%**
College/University students	**63%**

(*Street Youth and AIDS*, Social Program Evaluation Group, Queen's University at Kingston, 1989)[10]

Condoms and spermicidal creams or jellies may be difficult to obtain, especially in smaller towns. Finally, many sexually active youth do not visit a doctor regularly, and may be unaware that they have an STD, particularly if they do not have any symptoms.

Again, participants felt that explicit sex education covering these topics was essential. Youth-oriented resource materials that deal with these topics and combat youths' misconceptions are needed.

SCHOOL COUNSELLING

School counselling was identified as a particular sore point with youth. Youth were very clear that they often felt uncomfortable talking with a school counselor because they were concerned that their problems might be discussed with others or that personal information might eventually leak out to the rest of their school or community.

Furthermore, school counselors were sometimes perceived to be poorly trained or ill-informed about current youth issues and realities. Participants commented that workloads of counsellors were too high. As a result, counsellors were not as visible and accessible in the school hallways and classrooms. Youth would prefer that they have the opportunity to get to know a counsellor as a classroom teacher prior to consulting him/her regarding a personal problem. Often counsellors

appeared to the participants to be too busy with school administration and paperwork to truly be able to focus on those youth that needed their services.

An increase in the availability of informed and confidential counselors, both in school and in the community was recognized as another essential element for providing support to those students that requried it. Peer counselling and peer support groups were also strongly recommended.

LACK OF RESOURCES

Youth also took issue with the lack of resources, particularly in the smaller communities of B.C. These resources included information packages, (e.g. pamphlets, videotapes) counselling, health clinics, and information workshops. When such resources were available they were insufficient to keep up with the demand placed upon them.

Particularly in small communities, access to birth control and disease prevention methods is a problem. The staff at the local drugstore may be acquaintances of the youth or her/his family. Purchasing condoms or other products may lead to embarrassment or to friends and family learning that one is sexually active. As a result, many youth argued that comdom dispensing machines be available in all secondary schools.

Youth often did not know where or who to turn to when faced with a personal health crisis. Many young people are afraid to consult their family doctor, for fear that their parents may be informed (particularly if the visit related to sexual matters). Other resources such as youth clinics, planned parenthood clinics and agencies supporting pregnant teens are not made known to youth, either through their schools or community. Many youth felt that health clinics should be available at their secondary school. They wanted a place where they could go to receive information on all aspects of health without the problems of time or distance intervening.

Directories of youth services and wallet size cards listing emergency services for youth were two suggested methods for improving awareness of community resources. Updating these directories and wallet cards yearly could be ideal summer employment or community projects for youth in the area. Commercial sponsorship could be sought for the printing of these materials.

Conservative estimates of B.C. youth with eating disorders (1990):

Anorexia nervosa	**542**
Bulimia nervosa	**4,876**
Binge-eating disorder	**Unknown**

(From information supplied by Eating Disorder Resource Centre of B.C., July 20, 1992)[11]

EATING DISORDERS

Alongside the issue of sexual education was that of eating disorders. Influenced by the images created by the media and societal expectations of what an ideal person should look and act like, many young women are prone to some kind of eating disorder. By being made to focus on their body image, youth gain a false sense of control. Unfortunately there is very limited awareness and education about this problem, and even fewer places for youth to seek support.

YOUTH AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Youth involvement in the development of any program concerning youth health issues was deemed essential. Nothing came through so clear at the forums than the desire for youth to be involved: to be given the opportunity to share in the decision-making process and to discuss their feelings, concerns and questions in an arena that was non-judgemental and respectful of their point of view. Projects like the Healthy Schools initiatives model this kind of youth involvement and should receive ongoing support.

Because young people see their relationship with parents are important, good youth health programs should be provide opportunities for parents to learn communication skills. Youth and their parents need to learn how to talk to one another about sensitive health issues in a way that encourages open and frank discussion.

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Healthy Food Choices

Because Ballenas Secondary School in Parksville has had a strong peer counselling program for five years, the students decided to branch out into two other areas for their Healthy Schools project. One priority was to access healthy foods in an environment that was pleasant and conducive to socializing. Plans are under ways to canvas students to find out what lower-cost foods are desired. When appropriate, specific arrangments will be made to provide their choices through the current suppliers. Potted plants will also be purchased to give a homier feel to the new lunch/common room. The second priority was to enhance a sense of belonging for all students and workshops will be conducted on issues such as self-concept, taking care of oneself, and eating disorders. Students are taking advantage of a regular "school affairs" column in the local newspaper to keep everyone apprised of the progress of health-related programs at Ballenas.

(Adapted from Healthy Schools Update, Office of Health Promotion, Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, Spring 1992)[12]

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.05 **The goals and activities of the Healthy Schools Project (an initiative of the Office of Health Promotion, Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors) should be implemented in all schools in British Columbia.**

1.06 **Youth members (19 - 24) should be appointed to all regional health councils, and input sought from those under 19 on their issues and suggestions for programs and services.**

1.07 **Condom vending machines should be installed in both male and female washrooms in secondary schools throughout British Columbia.**

"For teenage girls, pregnancy is a major cause of dropping out of school. In-school day care would send these women back into the education system."

- participant in Kelowna

"Why are condoms so hush, hush? Why are people ashamed to talk about sex? . . . [We need] more condom commercials on TV. In movies, condoms should be mentioned in sex scenes. People should be open and say there's nothing wrong with buying condoms."

- participant in Nanaimo

"[Put] condom machines in schools."

- participant in Burnaby

MENTAL HEALTH

The title of mental health was chosen to encompass a number of related issues raised by the youth participants: loneliness, stress, low self-esteem, problems handling peer pressure, powerlessness and suicide.

Loneliness was considered a major problem. Some youth, especially those who feel different in some way, find it difficult to interact and communicate with their school peers and their families. They feel that no one cares for them.

17% of Canadian males and 23% of Canadian females aged 15 responded "very often" or "rather often" to "Do you ever feel lonely?

This was a higher percentage than in any of the other 9 countries surveyed.

(*The Health of Canada's Youth*, Health and Welfare Canada, 1992)[13]

SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

Many youth felt that their teachers and families do not understand the complexities of their lives. Their feelings and concerns are sometimes dismissed as trivial or infantile. Adults often make statements like "These are the best years of your life" and "When I was a kid, we had it so much tougher."

Others live in difficult, even abusive home environments, where physical, verbal, emotional or sexual abuse occurs. Even youth in loving homes are not immune to mental health problems - they are affected by the problems between their parents, parental substance abuse, financial worries, unsafe neighbourhoods, etc.

Forum facilitators noted that youth were anxious for their families to receive support and assistance. Whether dealing with school issues or or self-esteem, youth wanted to improve their communication and build on their relationships with their parents and family.

Youth recognized that some of their families were in trouble and needed help. The changing structure of the family, especially the increasing number of single family homes, greatly affects the mental well being of youth.

Many of the problems facing youth are linked to family problems, yet youth and their families often feel poorly equipped to deal with these issues. Participants felt that improving communication skills through courses in school and personal development workshops was a key constituent in solving these problems. They recognized that their parents and teachers often had not had the opportunity to acquire these skills either, and therefore advocated that this training be more widely available.

B.C. youth report higher rates of depression, more arguments with parents, unhappier home lives, and a bleaker outlook on the future, when compared to their peers in other Canadian provinces.

27% of B.C. girls aged 15 and 16 have thought about running away from home.

(Healthier Youth, Nov. 91 - Jan. 92)[14]

SOCIETAL PRESSURES

Many youth feel pressured by the demands of the society. They are unsure of their career goals and directions. At the same time, they know the uncertainties of the labour market, the increased competition for jobs and the importance of preparing for work. Many students feel pressure from parents to excel in school work, but find it difficult to see the relevance of what they are studying. They feel pressure from friends to conform to the norms of a particular group in the school. Having a part-time job is often critical for having enough money for entertainment and the right clothes, but only adds more stress. In addition, immigrant youth feel torn between retaining their traditional culture or "becoming Canadian."

POWERLESSNESS

Participants repeatedly spoke of their feelings of powerlessness. They felt that adults did not listen to their views and their concerns. Many participants expressed their pleasure in being heard at the forums. They often feel that adults see them as a "problem", a homogeneous body, unable to take responsibility or be trusted.

They have nowhere to go and nothing to do. At the local convenience store or in the mall, no one wants them hanging around. In stores, many youth reported that they were harassed to buy something and leave.

34% of Canadian youth, aged 15, feel that their parents expect too much of them.

72% of Canadian males and 74% of Canadian females, aged 15, feel that what their parents think of them is important.

(*The Health of Canada's Youth*, Health and Welfare Canada, 1992)[15]

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Coping with stress

There's no denying that ours is a stressful and fragmented society. And students - who frequently are buffeted by peer pressure as well as familial anxieties ranging from economic woes to divorce - are often particularly vulnerable to these forces. The students at Peter Skene Ogden Senior Secondary School in 100 Mile House have decided that enhanced self-esteem and a general improvement in attitude and spirit will be an important addition to the "healthiness" of their school. They will be adding to an existing peer helper group. This expansion is expected to bring helpful peer counselling to all the students who need to talk over a problem with someone who shares their concerns.

(Adapted from Healthy Schools Update, Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, Spring 1992)[16]

Furthermore, most felt powerless to influence the world around them; they did not see themselves as participants or contributors to their own schools and communities. Responsibility and trust are two key elements that enhance an individual's level of self-esteem. Unfortunately, youth felt that there were few forums in society where youth could develop their sense of self worth. While some youth and adults have worked to establish programs and centres where youth are involved in development, decision-making and implementation, these initiatives are just a insufficient to affect the majority of young people.

SUICIDE

Concern for friends and family members as well as personal experience helped to bring about discussion on the very emotional and sensitive topic of suicide. Many youth reported that grief for friends who had died through suicide or accident was unacknowledged by society at large, which expected them to get over their feelings in a few days and get back to normal. Counselling for survivors of suicide attempts or grieving friends and family members was largely unavailable.

Within the 15 to 24 age group, suicide ranked as the second leading cause of death behind accidents.

(*Suicide deaths in British Columbia*, B.C. Division of Vital Statistics Quarterly Digest, Vol. 1, No. 4)[17]

The mortality rate by suicide of status Indians aged 15 to 24 was 4.7 times higher than the provincial rate.

(*Suicide, Native Indians*, B.C. Division of Vital Statitics, 1989)[18]

In B.C. youth, suicide rates increased almost 60% from 1970 to 1985.

27% of B.C. youth have thought about committing suicide.

Female youth in B.C. have the highest rate of suicide in Canada, outside the Northwest Territories; the suicide rate of adolscent males, is twice the rate of females.

(Healthier Youth, November 91 - Jan. 92)[19]

LACK OF CRISIS COUNSELLING

Continued discussion of mental health resulted in concerns about the lack of education and resources for dealing with the problems already raised.

Youth felt that there were too few individuals and places where youth could simply talk about their problems. Providing suicide prevention programs, support groups and counselling, (including peer counselling programs), would allow youth to feel confident that there were places to turn in times of crisis.

ROLE OF SCHOOLS

Educating both youth and adults about these problems would better prepare them for when a crisis did arise. This education would help provide answers to youth looking for help when confronted with problems of grief or when a friend appears suicidal. Youth repeatedly identified school as the logical place to learn these skills and knowledge.

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Role modelling for conflict resolution

Evolving out of Golden's Project Self-Esteem is a more sophisticated program on conflict resolution that is targeted for Grade 8 students. Begun in March 1992, as a pilot project in Golden Secondary School, this important module is taught by parents. It includes a teacher follow-up as reinforcement. In a safe and structured atmosphere, students learn how to handle the typical kinds of conflicts that can develop on the playground or in the classroom. If the pilot proves as successful as Project Self-Esteem has been, then conflict resolution will likely be incorporated into the school curriculum.

(Adapted from Healthy Schools Update, Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, Spring 1992).[20]

Given the major role school plays in the lives of youth, many of Recommendations made concerned making school a more personal, caring and involving place where young people feel valued and consulted in the decision-making process. These recommendations are discussed fully in Section 2 of this report.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Most importantly, any program, whether it involve awareness and prevention, support for those youth coming to terms with their problems, development of more phone in crisis lines, or peer counselling, has to include youth and families in the development and implementation process. In this way participants argued that self-esteem, confidence, trust and understanding can be nurtured between youth and adults.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.08 The provincial government should close existing gaps between programs and services so that suicide prevention programs, grief support groups, and mental health counselling are available to youth in every region of the province.

A Step in the Right Direction ...

New Youth Mediation Opens in Surrey

Opened in March 1992 with assistance from the Youth Grants program, the Youth Mediation Centre is the first of its kind in Canada. Tracy Selinger and Angela Dyck, both graduates of the Frank Hurt Secondary mediation program, saw the need for a better way to deal with the conflict in youth's lives. Based on their school experience, they proposed a youth-run centre affiliated with the Conflict Resolution Centre. One staff person and 17 trained youth volunteers mediate and assist with office duties, fundraising, publicity, and demonstrations.

The centre hopes to encourage teens to discover ways of resolving disputes other than the current trends of violence and vandalism. Nineteen schools and organizations have expressed interest in the training the centre plans to conduct in the fall. Workshops in conflict resolution, mediation training and professional development for trained mediators are offered.

Teens and their parents have taken advantage of the mediation service. Mediation is also available between boyfriend and girlfriend, friends, adversaries, co-workers, and neighbours. Youth mediations cost $10.00 (plus GST) for each person per 2 hour session. 95% of all youth mediations are resolved within this two hours.
(Based on information supplied by Angela Dyck, Youth Mediation Centre, July 6, 1992)[21]

"Lack of self-esteem in young people doesn't allow them to deal with . . . all the problems they encounter.

- participant in Nanaimo

ABUSE

It was apparent from the six of eight forums in which abuse was discussed, how aware youth are about the issues surrounding abuse, rape and sexual harassment. They also demonstrated their knowledge of the interconnection and complexity of this issue. Youth recognized that abuse is directed at a range of differing individuals and groups, and that the impact of such abuse often results in a myriad of problems. Participants agreed that there is a broad spectrum of abuse which includes: verbal and emotional abuse, physical and sexual abuse, as well as rape and sexual harassment.

Both teenagers and children (less than 12) comprised a larger proportion of the victims of sexual assault than adults. Four out of every ten sexual assault victims were under 12, four between 12 and 19, and two, 20 and over. Teens 12 to 19 comprise 11% of the Canadian population.

Over 70% of sexual assault victims of all ages were female.

(*Teenage Victims of Violent Crime*, Juristat Service Bulletin, Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada, March 1992)[22]

There was also recognition amongst youth that all forms of abuse occur with a greater level of frequency than most people realize or are willing to admit. They were aware that more sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows than by strangers.

DISCRIMINATION

As well, participants were concerned about abuse directed towards identifiable groups in society, including First Nations peoples, members of the gay community, street people and immigrants. Even new students that had moved from elsewhere in the country to a new school and community were often singled out as being different and could become the recipients of abuse. Participants agreed that this kind of abuse, centring on identifiable groups in the community, was the result of misunderstanding and stereotyping.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

Participants also argued that use of alcohol and drugs could often cause individuals to act irrationally and abuse those around them. The abused victim might then manifest their feelings and emotions in a variety of ways. Youth identified depression, lack of confidence, low self-esteem or suicide as some of the results of abuse amongst its victims. In turn, victims

may turn to drugs and alcohol to obtain temporary relief from their pain. Youth discussed the cycle of abuse that can be perpetuated when victims do not receive treatment.

INDIRECT VICTIMS

Youth also recognized that the victims of abuse did not only include those that were its direct recipients. Rather, abusive situations could impact indirectly, but very painfully, on other individuals. An example from one of the forums that illustrates this point is that of abusive spousal relationships. Often the children of such couples, who witness the abuse, attempt to direct their anxiety and stress through some of the outlets already identified. Other participants saw running away from home, or withdrawing from school, as possible avenues for youth in such abusive environments.

Children witness over 80% of wife assaults.

Studies show that 40 to 60% of assaultive men witnessed assault or were beaten as kids.

(*One Hit Leads to Another Study Guide*, Friday Street Productions, 1991)[23]

MALE - FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS

Another key element in the discussion of abuse was the role of power and control. Some female participants argued that in their relationships with men, the male often sought a dominant rather than an equal relationship with them.

Abusive language, such as derogatory remarks or put downs, were used to gain control of one partner over another. In more dramatic cases of abuse, physical or sexual violence, including rape, was used to achieve a similar result. The lower the self-esteem of the victimized partner, the more likely she was to put up with the abuse.

Date or acquaintance rape was raised by many young women. They claim that there are still young men who do not understand that "no means no."

Participants were pointed out that abuse in a relationship was not always perpetrated by a man. Although sexual abuse, including rape, was more likely to be used by a male, women were capable of using emotional and verbal abuse to secure dominance in a relationship.

Furthermore, youth at the forums pointed out that all forms of abuse, including sexual abuse, occurred not just in dating couples or casual relationships, but also between married couples. Abuse between young couples, youth felt, was often a behavior learned in the home environment. Here then is another abusive cycle, like that associated with

drugs and alcohol, that youth recognized as self-perpetuating and often difficult to stop.

AWARENESS

Finding solutions to these problems must begin with the realization and admittance by society that abuse is taking place. Included in this increased awareness is that abuse transcends all economic, social and cultural backgrounds. The personal experiences of abuse, including rape, related by forum participants, testifies that we can no longer afford to ignore the existence of this issue.

Recognition of the issues involves education of youth and adults. Participants recommended raising awareness by beginning discussion of abuse in kindergarten. Theatre can be effectively used to raise and discuss the issue in a safe, non-threatening way that children and youth can relate to. Workshops and prevention programs need to be made more available for both youth and adults throughout the province.

Young women and men expressed the need to involve men in the awareness and healing process of female victims of rape. They recognized that men and women need to create bridges of communication so that this kind of abuse can be stopped.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Similarly, youth argued for greater levels of community involvement and awareness through the creation and participation in support groups, crisis lines and safe houses for victims of abuse.

Both community-based counselling and peer counselling programs in schools should receive increased levels of support. Greater efforts must be made to ensure that young people know where to obtain help.

62% of sexual assaults in Canada are unreported.

(*Victims of Crime, Canadian Urban Victimization Survey*, Statistics Canada, 1983)[24]

CONFIDENTIALITY

Youth also talked about the need for confidentiality. Participants argued that the lack of confidentiality, perceived or otherwise, often prevented youth from using such counselling services. This was more apparent in the smaller communities of B.C. where counsellors may be acquaintances of the youth or her/his family.

Youth in all of the forums appeared to be completely unaware that all abuse of persons under 19 must be reported to the Ministry of Social Services. The reporting requirements may be keeping young people who have suffered abuse from

seeking assistance for fear that their disclosures will not be held in confidence and may result in repercussions to their families and others.

SEX OFFENDERS

Concern over the need for more on-going treatment facilities for sex offenders was expressed as another solution. Youth felt that offenders were often released from prison without having had adequate counselling and therapy. Without such therapy participants saw little hope for reducing the chance that offenders would not commit acts of abuse again. Treatment for adolescent sex offenders is especially lacking.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Finally, youth expressed their awareness and appreciation for the efforts that law enforcement has made in the preceding years around the issues of abuse. Youth were pleased with the way in which police have responded to the issues of family violence, rape, and child sexual abuse. Youth want to become more involved with their local police, in addressing abuse and other justice issues. Through joint committees, both groups can work together on developing programs such as self-defense courses, security escort services, and community awareness and education of the issues of abuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.09 Support should be given to the creation of support groups, crisis lines, and transition houses for the victims of abuse and their families in all regions of the province. Counselling services should be available to children and youth who witness spousal abuse.

1.10 Treatment of sex-offenders must be given priority during their prison term. In particular, treatment programs for adolescent offenders should be created. Ongoing research is needed to develop more effective treatment programs.

"No matter what stage, NO means NO!"

- participant in Burnaby

CRIME

Crime, committed by youth or which has youth as its victims, was considered to be another important topic. Participants felt that crime committed by youth has dramatically influenced perceptions of the adult population, and has led to fear of young people especially amongst seniors.

While only a small percentage of youth are involved in committing crime, it is this group which receives the most media attention. There is also little recognition that young people are themselves often the victims of criminal acts of youth and adult perpetrators.

Female youths were charged by police at the rate of 22 per 1,000 female youth population, less than one-quarter of the rate for male youths (97 per 1,000).

(*Female young offenders, 1990-91*, Juristat Service Bulletin, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada, May 1992)[25]

Youth saw this kind of generalization as extremely damaging to any efforts in stimulating communication between themselves and adults. This perception that all kids are "up to something," prevents the majority of youth and their positive actions and behaviour from being fully recognized.

Those under the age of 25 had the highest rate of victimization in all categories of personal offences, and these high rates decline rapidly with increasing age after this point.

(*Victims of Crime, Canadian Urban Victimization Survey*, Research and Statistics Group, Solicitor General Canada, 1983)[26]

THE MEDIA

The on-going glamourization and heightened level of reporting of criminal activity was partly to blame. Youth stated that they sought recognition of their positive efforts and actions, but that the general population seemed more interested in receiving information on the negative aspects of society.

NEED FOR ATTENTION

The need to be noticed and acknowledged was also seen as part of the reason why some youth commit criminal offences. Unable to gain recognition and acceptance from their peers and adults, some youth commit crimes in order to gain attention. Others are supporting a drug habit, or want the excitement or "rush" that came from committing criminal acts.

20.2% of children in B.C. were estimated to live in poverty in 1989.

(Social Planning and Research Council of B.C.)[27]

47.7% of unattached persons in Canada under the age of 25 were living below the poverty line in 1986, a higher percentage than any other age group including seniors.

(Youth Policy Today, Vol. 3, No. 4, Canadian Youth Foundation)[28]

YOUTH AND POVERTY

Poverty was also argued by some young people as another contributing factor to youth crime. While some groups saw poverty pushing youth to engage in crime to support themselves and/or their families, other groups viewed youth poverty as a key factor in the victimization of youth. Participants felt that youth, particularly street youth, are the most vulnerable and likely victims of crime.

Crime committed by youth against other youth often goes unreported. Youth do not always report minor theft because they don't want to be a "snitch." Being "punched out" or otherwise assaulted may not be recognized as a crime. The lack of trust young people have in the police may also discourage laying of charges. The lack of consequences for the perpetrator may cause the repetition of the criminal behavior toward the same or other victims.

LACK OF RESOURCES

Participants agreed that the victims often have few avenues in which to turn to for help. The resources for assisting these youth are either already stretched to their limits, or were non-existent.

Some forum participants felt that the police spend too much time on law enforcement, and not enough time on prevention. Distrust exists between youth and police because young people do not always see police as a preventive agent working with the community on various issues. (This may be less true in

23% of victims of violent crime were between 12 and 19, double the proportion of adolescents in the 1990 Canadian population (11%)

(*Teenage Victims of Violent Crime*, Juristat Service Bulletin, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada, March 1992)[29]

Although the majority of those accused of violent crime were adults, this was less often when the victims were younger. 46% of those accused of crimes against younger teens 12 - 15 were themselves 12 - 19. One-third of those accused of violent crimes against 16 -19 were themselves in that age group.

(*Teenage Victims of Violent Crime*, Juristat Service Bulletin, Canadian Centre for Justics Statistics, Statistics Canada, March 1992)[30]

communities which assign community liaison officers to all elementary and secondary schools.)

In order to alleviate this distrust, youth wanted to be involved with their local police in working together on preventive programs dealing with youth crime and related issues (e.g. dry grad). They recognized that such a combined or community-based effort would be more likely to create tangible results, especially in building trust and communication between the police and youth.

LACK OF ALTERNATIVES

A lack of activities and outlets for young people emerged as another contributing factor to crime amongst youth. While it was generally agreed that most B.C. communities, large and small, provide some recreation facilities and programs for youth, these do not always meet the needs of youth. Young people, therefore, choose not to use these services. Youth identified two main reasons for this.

First, most facilities, or programs developed for youth tended to interest only select groups of young people, or were not specifically centred on youth but rather on a broad range of age groups and interests. Second, local efforts to create youth programs, while recognized as well-intentioned, often fail because youth themselves are not asked to participate in the development and coordination process. Participants did not feel that any youth program could reach its full potential if it was not designed to some degree by and for youth.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

This idea of programs by and for youth also played an integral part in creating more and better criminal rehabilitation and prevention programs. Participants suggested that young people who had been involved in criminal activity should be invited into the classroom to educate other youth about the realities of crime. This would, as participants argued, accomplish three goals.

First, it would educate youth on the consequences of criminal activity and how crime can impact on society's well-being. Secondly, this kind of peer education would help dispell the

glamorization of crime that has been created in the media. Thirdly, and most importantly, these young offenders would begin to develop self-esteem by helping others.

Youth involvement, whether with their local police, community recreation centres or schools, is an esential and positive step in fostering better communication and trust between youth, adults and the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.11 **Police departments should establish liaison agreements with local elementary and secondary schools, recreation centres and community groups, and become key participants in the development and delivery of prventive programs dealing with youth crime, criminal gang activity, substance abuse, abuse and related isues.**

1.12 **Youth poverty should be addressed by ensuring that preventive services are available to families so that young people can remain at home in a stable environment, and by ensuring that adequate financial and emotional support is given to young people for whom living at home is not a viable alternative.**

1.13 **Young offenders should be encouraged or required to contribute their time (perhaps as a portion of their community service) to classroom discussions.**

"We only hear about the bad kids . . ."

- participant in Nanaimo

A Step in the Right Direction ...

The SCAR of Rioting

Penticton Secondary School students are working to prevent a recurrence of the riot that disrupted their city during the Peach Festival in July, 1991. "A term project was coming up," said Ed Kolasinski, "so we thought about forming a committee that would help prevent future riots." By the end of 1991, seven students had formed SCAR, Student Committee Against Rioting.

"The energy level was phenomenal," said Sherry Ashe who witnessed the riot. "We were out driving when we saw this huge mass of people; the energy surrounding them was incredible. It was extremely easy to get caught up in."

SCAR's experience and concern sparked a student poll at Penticton Secondary School. One hundred and fifty students were surveyed on their views of what actions could have prevented the July 1991 riot, and their ideas for prevention of future riots. The result was a top 10 list of points for riot prevention that was presented to city council.

Mayor Jack Kimberley said that many of SCAR's concerns had been addressed before the suggestion list arrived. "Most of the 10 points are already being dealt with by the RCMP and the 'Pride in Penticton' program," said Kimberley. This program is in place to ensure that the city and the RCMP are better prepared for the 1992 Peach Festival and B.C. Day weekend.

Though city officials do not agree with all of its suggestions, SCAR has won the further attention of city council, according to Alderman Dave Perry. "Our intention is to put two SCAR representatives on our 'Pride in Penticton' Committee," said Perry. "We're also setting up a Youth Needs Committee and Survey which would include youth representatives."

SCAR intends to expand to include junior high students. "Most kids see our committee as a good idea," said Kolasinski. "We were worried that other students wouldn't think it was cool, but all we needed was a start. Once one or two of us spoke out, everyone else thought it was a cool idea."

(B.C. Youth, Spring 1992)[31]

"Teens are viewed as negative, vandalizing, drug-abusing people. But we're not all like that!"

- participant in Nanaimo

RACISM AND MULTICULTURALISM

Forum participants regularly raised the issue of racism as a major problem facing youth. Although the recent riots in Los Angeles and Toronto may have raised awareness of the issue just prior to the forums, racism and multiculturalism were also key problems identified during the Canadian Unity forums held by the B.C. Youth Council during the summer of 1991. At the Canadian Unity forums, youth saw multiculturalism as a reality of modern-day Canada and a desirable and integral part of our Canadian identity. They identified the need for racism and prejudice to be addressed if Canada were to remain united.

Persons reporting Aboriginal origin made up 4.4% of the total British Columbia Population and 6.0% of the youth population.

(1986 Census, British Columbia, Aboriginal Origin by Age Group)[32]

PREVALENCE OF RACISM

In the Youth Talks forums, youth also discussed the prevalence of racism in our society. They felt that it is far more prevalent then most people are willing to admit. Frequently, racism directed toward First Nations peoples was considered as important as racism directed toward new immigrants or other ethnic minorities.

It was common to hear youth talk about almost daily encounters with racism. They were concerned that societal attitudes which still condone racism or prejudice influence the attitudes and outlooks of youth.

These biases are particularly difficult for youth to contend with ifthey come from the adults whom they respect and love. Family values profoundly influence the values of youth; one can perhaps avoid holding the attitudes of others in the community, but it is much more difficult not to adopt the views of their families.

VISIBLE MINORITIES

Participants considered racism a key factor in the alienation of visible minorities in B.C. This alienation , they felt, causes some new Canadians to withdraw into insular ethnic communities or join ethnic youth gangs to gain acceptance and support. These new immigrants generally want to be "Canadians", but are discouraged by the lack of language training and the prejudice they encounter.

Immigrants under 18 years of age represented 24% of all immigrants coming to B.C. from 1980 to 1990.

Percentage of students with language other than English spoken at home:

Abbotsford	**9%**
Surrey	**12%**
Richmond	**24%**
Vancouver	**51%**
Burnaby	**19%**
North Vancouver	**7%**
Greater Victoria	**7%**

(Settlement Services for Immigrant Children, Ministry of Provincial Secretary and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Immigration, 1991)[33]

CONCERNS OF IMMIGRANT YOUTH

Racism, youth felt, had the greatest impact on new immigrant youth. These new Canadian youth have to cope with the culture shock of moving to a new country, the difficulty in learning a new language, the regular conflicts of growing up and the pull of traditional and "Canadian" culture, in addition to prejudice or racism.

As a result, the participants felt, immigrant youth might be more at risk to dropout of school. The lack of acceptance and the discrimination these youth sometimes experience, would make school an uncomfortable place to be.

Although participants were unclear as to what degree some new Canadian youth might become involved in criminal or gang-related activity, they felt that ostracism, prejudice or racism in school and society was a contributing factor. Through membership in a gang, a young individual has an opportunity to be recognized and accepted, something that does not always happen in mainstream society.

42% of graduates said racial discrimination was a serious problem for students; among minority students, that figure rose to 48%

(Ministry of Education Annual Report, 1990/91)[34]

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST YOUTH AND OTHER GROUPS

In many of the forums, youth extended their discussion of discrimination and prejudice to include the biases toward the poor, the disabled, members of the gay community, and indeed to any person or group that looked or acted differently than is the cultural norm. Often youth felt that as a group, they were themselves discriminated against.

Sales staff in stores assume all youth cause trouble and are shoplifters. Mall managers see them as harassing other customers. Many youth felt that store, community, and agency policies discriminated against them unfairly.

ROLE OF EDUCATION

Education was seen as the first step in fighting all forms of discrimination. In the case of schools, a greater number of multicultural programs and courses that focus both on First Nations peoples as well as the new Canadians is required. These same courses should teach children and youth about prejudice and racism, including their origins and effects. Furthermore, such education should commence on, ideally in kindergarten.

A number of recommendations focused on alleviating some of the problems faced by new Canadians.

Two out of three 1990 graduates felt that ethnic lifestyles and values add to our society; three out of four said they enjoyed working with students from other ethnic or cultural groups.

(Ministry of Education Annual Report, 1990/91)[35]

First, school counsellors and social service professionals should have specific training in cross-cultural issues. Translators and home-school coordinators should be available to assist youth and parents in the critical first period of settlement.

Improved access to English as a Second Language instruction should be made available, for without a working knowledge of english, many new Canadians struggle with the basic components of daily living.

As with many other issues, participants felt that youth themselves could provide support to their new Canadian peers. Youth argued that all Canadians should take the time to appreciate and understand the difficulties that immigrants face and the richness of their traditional cultures.

EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

Participants also suggested increasing the number and accessibility of exchange programs for youth. They felt that, too often, exchange programs are restricted to those students who demonstrate academic excellence while many hard working, interested and motivated students are excluded from the opportunities that exchange programs offer. Therefore, broader application requirements are suggested to ensure that a better cross section of the B.C. student body participates in these programs.

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Multi-cultural approach to food preparation

While several schools have adopted a food-related approach to creating a healthier learning environment, students at Wells - Barkerville Junior Secondary School in the northern interior have spiced up their project with a uniquely multi-cultural angle. By shopping and then preparing foods from other cultures, the students will be getting not just a good lunch, but also a better understanding of how other ethnic groups get their nutritional requirements from different foods and dishes. This tasty program will also offer valuable experience in shopping on a budget, menu planning and cooking.

(Adapted from Healthy Schools Update, Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, Spring 1992.)[36]

Finally, youth suggested that governments at all levels support the development of programs and events that promote and enhance multiculturalism throughout B.C. Multicultural celebrations, such as Folk Fest in Victoria, First Nations festivals, and the inclusion of multicultural elements in the celebration of civic, provincial and national holidays were identified as worthwhile contributions to the development of tolerance and understanding among all of B.C.'s citizens.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.14 The Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology should ensure that cross-cultural communications training is incorporated into the education of police, health care professionals, school counsellors, and social service professionals.

1.15 The Government of British Columbia should ensure that English as a Second Language and immigrant services are available promptly to immigrant youth and their families.

1.16 The provincial government, in cooperation with other levels of government, should support the development of programs and events that promote and enhance tolerance and understanding of multiculturalism in B.C.

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Vancouver Youth Theatre Explores Real Life

Theatre can be a very powerful means of exploring issues and conflicts. When original plays are created by young people through the process of playbuilding, the results can be explosive. Vancouver Youth Theatre has had a history of examining issues relevant to youth through this process of discussion, research, and improvization leading to development of an original script. There's usually a combination of comedy and serious drama in the plays. As well as learning theatre skills, the young actors learn life skills, such as how to listen and communicate, examine attitudes, and solve problems.

Topics explored in previous productions include pressures on youth, the environment, substance abuse, and family relations. Recent plays address the issues of racism, Canadian identity, and the challenges facing young immigrants. Will the Real Canadian ...? looked at the multi-cultural and multi-faceted make-up of Canadian society. Canadian Stories was based on the real life stories of young immigrants who were interviewed by the youth in the theatre company. The play dealt with the feelings of the new Canadians who couldn't understand English or be understood by others, who are torn between the customs and beliefs of their traditional culture, and who have experienced war and deprivation.

Shades sheds light on some pertinent questions in the area of race relations, which concern young people. Through humour, satire, drama and music, the five young actors, each from a different ethnic background, explore the roots and perpetuating influences of racism.

The Vancouver Youth Theatre performs its plays in Lower Mainland schools, and tours other areas when possible. Performances are followed by a workshop/discussion period for the actors to generate an exchange of ideas about the issue among the students.

(Based on news releases and newsletters from the Vancouver Youth Theatre, 1991/92)[37]

"Racism is like a sleeping dog. One day it will wake up and bite you."

- participant in Kelowna

"People are prejudiced. Adults criticize us for how we talk and what we wear."

- participant in Nanaimo

CONCLUSION

Participants were very clear that any future changes or solutions to the issues they identified must include improving communication between youth and their parents and youth and the community, must build the self-esteem of young people and give them the sense that they are heard.

Youth are eager and anxious for the opportunity to become involved in their communities. They desire the tools that will facilitate taking on a larger share of the responsibility for issues affecting them.

Youth should be invited to participate in task forces, committees, and councils where recommendations are being made which affect young people. The community consultations normally held to discuss these issues should be explicitly organized to ensure that youth views are effectively gathered. Furthermore, these views will need to be taken seriously, and not given less value than those of the experts or other community groups.

Another critical tool that youth have identified, is that of education. Improved levels and access to education were regularly identified by youth as essential to solving the problems discussed at the forums. As youth recognized, this new level of education will involve not only themselves, but parents,teachers, counsellors and other members of society that regularly interact with young people.

Communication and inter-personal skills were repeatedly mentioned as contributing to the family problems youth experience. Young people desire close, caring relationships with their families. They believe that families need preventive programs which teach skills in communication, conflict resolution, and parenting, in order to survive the stresses placed on them by modern life.

Whether it is the problem of substance abuse, crime, health, or any of the issues already mentioned, youth have a key role to play. Through their involvement in the decision making process, not only will communication and understanding be fostered, but youth will also view themselves, and be viewed by others, as fundamental players in addressing the issues that impact upon their lives.

". . . finally we could talk to people who actually want to hear what we have to say."

- participant in Chilliwack

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1.17 **Municipalities and school districts should collaborate to produce directories of youth services available in the community and wallet-size cards listing emergency services to be provided to all secondary students.**

1.18 **Preventive services in support of families, including counselling and training in communication and parenting skills, should be incorporated into the mandate of the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Health and given funding.**

1.19 **All levels of government should ensure that councils, advisory committees and other groups advising on issues affecting young people include representation of youth, and actively seek youth input as part of any community consultations.**

1.20 **Provincial governments should act as a model for other levels of government by ensuring that youth participation is invited on all task forces, committees, and councils where recommendations are being made which affect youth, and by ensuring that effective consultation processes are put in place to gather youth views on the issues under consideration.**

"This forum was good, because it had teens AND adults working in groups, together."

- participant in Nanaimo

"Finally, a microphone for the release of the frustrations . . . "

- participant in Chilliwack

EDUCATION AND SCHOOL DROPOUTS

INTRODUCTION

In the afternoon of the forum, youth were given the option of attending a session on education and school dropouts or one on recreation opportunities for youth. The education sessions proved to be popular. They were usually the most creative and energetic of the day.

Participants recognized the importance of an education in preparing for their adult lives. Deciding what career directions to take is a major concern of young people.

56% of 15 - 19 year olds reported that they were concerned "a great deal" or "quite a bit" about what they will do after finishing school.

(*Ready for Today*, Canadian Youth Foundation, 1987)[38]

Many youth reported that one of the most positive aspects of school life was the opportunity for social interaction. Meeting new people, strengthening friendships and improving inter-personal skills were all part of this socializing. These skills were seen to be vital for their future personal lives and employment.

Youth were quick to point out the benefits of a hands-on approach to their education. They enjoyed learning the most when their classroom knowledge was applied to some practical purpose. Mechanics, computers, drama and field trips were cited time and time again as examples of the way students wanted to learn.

Other positive elements of school were active, friendly teachers, respect from teachers and peers, extra-curricular activities, and creative projects outside the structure and regimentation of daily school life.

For some students though, school is not a happy experience. They feel isolated and lonely, lost in a system which is boring, irrelevant, and routine. They lack respect, recognition, caring and a sense that they are a valued member of the school community. They feel that teachers and counsellors do not, or are unable to, make the time to give them personal attention.

As a result, too many youth leave school before completing their education. Three students out of every ten drop out, at enormous costs to themselves and society.

Nearly 65% of the jobs created between 1990 and 2000 will require a minimum of 12 years of education, compared to 53% of existing jobs.

The 137,000 students who dropped out in 1989 will cost Canadians more than $4 billion.

(*Dropping Out: The Cost to Canada*, Conference Board of Canada, 1992)[39]

The participants had many ideas for addressing these issues. They recommended changes to the curriculum, teaching and learning, school environment, support services, and the level of community involvement.

The key, young people felt, to reducing school dropout and improving youth satisfaction with their schooling, was to involve students in all facets of decision-making, to ensure that each student feels valued as a member of the school community, and to make schools a vital part of the overall community.

"School should be a place where you learn about yourself and what you want out of life . . . Getting from school [to the work force] shouldn't be such a hassle. Isn't school supposed to help you get a career and not make it harder?"

- participant in Fort St. John

CURRICULUM

Many youth reported that they found their course work boring, uninteresting and lacking relevance to their career goals. Several commented that the curriculum seems geared only toward those students headed towards university. Often, even students planning for post-secondary education said they did not see the value of their courses.

A year after leaving school, one out of three 1990 graduates estimated that less than half of what they learned in school was meaningful. Almost all of the graduates felt it was important for school to teach practical life skills, but only a third said this was done effectively in schools.

(Ministry of Education Annual Report, 1990/91)[40]

CAREER PREPARATION

Few students felt that they were properly prepared to make career decisions. Participants were virtually unanimous in calling for better career education in the schools. Work experience, more career planning and career exploration (e.g. using programs like CHOICES) were recommended.

A better job could be done of relating classroom subjects to the real world. As particular skills and knowledge are being taught, real-life examples of how they are applied should be given. Youth recommended that course work allow for more options to solve problems that relate to real-life situations, so that even in math or science, students would have the opportunity to find out more about the careers which interest them. When projects are assigned in class, students should be encouraged to relate the projects they choose to their career goals.

Some participants felt that the schools they attended provided too few elective courses. They suggested that youth should be given the opportunity to take courses, available in the community (e.g. Industrial First Aid), through adult education in the school or at a college, for elective credit, particularly if the students can demonstrate the relevance to their career aspirations. This would be particularly valuable in smaller schools, which cannot afford to offer a wider cross-section of electives.

WORK EXPERIENCE

More career preparation and pre-apprenticeship programs should be offered. While some youth indicated that a few of these programs were offered in their schools, they felt that there should be more programs offering in-depth preparation for a

wider selection of careers. Meaningful and relevant work experience should be an integral part of these programs thereby allowing students to make better and more informed career choices while still in school. Students should have the option to have much more extensive work experience or cooperative education programs, throughout the year, rather than just a few short weeks.

Ninety students took part in the Passport to Apprenticeship program in 1990/91.

6,945 students were enrolled in Career Preparation programs in 1990/91.

(Ministry of Education Annual Report, 1990/91)[41]

PREPARATION FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Other youth suggested improved opportunities for youth to integrate first year college or university courses into their programs. This would provide students the insight into the demands and potential for post-secondary education.

CANADIAN STUDIES

Canadian studies should be an important part of the curriculum. Many youth felt that they learned more about the United States of America or Europe than they did about their own country. The Canadian history they were taught often ignored the contributions of immigrants and aboriginal culture. They called for a more well-rounded presentation of historical events, which included the viewpoints of the different groups involved in the event, conflict or issue. More attention to current events, examining these events in their historical context, was thought to be a more appropriate way of learning history.

There was particular recognition given to the importance of including native history and culture throughout the school curriculum. Many youth felt embarrassed by their lack of knowledge about the native communities in their area. Native youth felt that they were 'non-persons' because of the lack of attention given their history and culture.

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Multi-cultural education was also desired. Youth pointed out that racism and prejudice prevalent in the community must be addressed if Canada is to live up to its reputation of tolerance toward others.

Discrimination in schools is a problem, contributing to school dropout of native youth or youth from visible minorities, victimization of those who are different, or gang activity.

Youth at these forums echoed the support given to a mandatory course on multiculturalism at the senior secondary level at the Youth Council's Canadian Unity forums held in 1991. They also recommended that the cultural heritage of students be celebrated in school assemblies, in projects, and in the decor of the school. The participants recognized that development of tolerance and understanding needs to begin at the earliest stages of education, preferably at Kindergarten and continue throughout schooling.

What problems outside of school made you leave school?

Family responsibilities	**19%**
Wanted to work	**17%**
Drug or alcohol problem	**17%**
Money problems	**14%**
Stress	**13%**
Problems with the law	**8%**
Other	**7%**
Health problems	**6%**
No child care	**3%**

(Dropping Out and Dropping In, Canadian Youth Foundation, 1991)[42]

LIFE SKILLS

The most important change that youth sought in the curriculum was the introduction of more life skills training. Such training should include: resume writing and job search, personal finances, nutrition and fitness, inter-personal and communication skills, personal development, decision-making and problem-solving, leadership skills, sex education, preparation for parenting, prevention of substance abuse, sexual, physical and emotional/verbal abuse, and suicide, emotional health, conflict resolution, and peer pressure.

PROBLEMS AT HOME

Youth pointed out that it is often personal or family problems that are responsible for problems at school. Improving students' knowledge about these issues and skills would go a long way toward addressing dropout. Integrating life skills with other subjects such as English, would make those courses more interesting and relevant, and would deal with the key social issues which youth feel are critical to modern life.

Skills and knowledge in these areas need to be taught in a very practical and frank way, with ample opportunity for youth to participate

actively in the learning process. Experiential learning was recommended by a number of participants.

Community members (e.g. business people, police, drug and alcohol workers, health nurses), persons who have experienced some of the problems discussed (e.g persons with AIDS, teen parents, persons with an addiction) and parents should be involved in this learning. In particular, youth felt that parents and youth could benefit from learning communication skills together. Further discussion of these life skills issues may be found under the headings of substance abuse, health, abuse, mental health, crime, and racism.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.01 **Career education should be an essential part of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum. Students should be given opportunities to learn about a wide range of careers, to identify their interests and aptitudes, to learn skills of career planning, and to explore the suitability of various career options.**

2.02 **Students should have the opportunity to find out more about careers that interest them in their class assignments and projects.**

2.03 **Cooperative education, career preparation and Passport to Apprenticeship programs, offered in partnership with business, industry and post-secondary institutions should be available to students in all secondary schools. All students should receive credit for work experience toward their secondary school diploma.**

2.04 **Schools should allow students to take community or post-secondary courses for elective credit. In some cases, students should also be able to acquire college or university credit for these courses.**

2.05 **Canadian and multicultural studies should form an integral component of the K - 12 humanities strand. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that courses in Canadian history and culture reflect the contributions of First Nations and immigrant groups.**

2.06 Schools should celebrate the cultural heritage of their students through school assemblies, menus in school cafeterias, projects, and the decor of the school.

2.07 Home-school coordinators and translation services should be available in communities with significant numbers of English as a Second Language families to assist them in understanding the Canadian educational system and dealing with any problems their children have in adapting to school.

2.08 Peer support programs should be established in schools with large numbers of ESL students.

2.09 All school districts should implement the Learning for Living curriculum as quickly as possible preferably in advance of the required implementation dates. Professional development should be available to teachers as an integral component of the implementation process.

2.10 School districts should ensure that all youth have an understanding of the challenges and difficulties of parenthood through experiential exercises.

2.11 Greater emphasis must be placed in schools on developing self-esteem and skills in communication, stress management, conflict management, and problem-solving. Suicide prevention should also be incorporated into the school curriculum.

2.12 Schools should educate children, from kindergarten through to graduation, on physical, sexual, and emotional/verbal abuse. Children should learn what abuse is, what they can do to prevent or reduce the likelihood they might be victimized, and what to do if they experience abuse.

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Planning your career with peers

What is it about peer counselling that has B.C. students signing up to help each other overcome problems?

"Peer counsellors develop good life and leadership skills, and gain confidence," says Charise Karjala, project coordinator for Simon Fraser University's Peer Career Counsellor Training Project.

Charise and fellow SFU students Tammy MacPherson and Stephanie Born developed the program and assisted counsellors and teachers in preparation for training students in career-development peer counselling.

"The atmosphere in a school with peer counselling is more energetic and communal than in one without it," Charise says. "Kids relate much better to peers than to authority figures."

A peer career counsellor's job is to expose myths about career development, help fellow students deal with anxiety about career choices, financial barriers, lack of educational prerequisites and career pressure from friends or parents.

"We show them how people make their own decision," Tammy says.

(Adapted from B.C. Youth, Winter 90/91)

"Make student involvement a priority in all aspects of education. Leadership credit courses would create this opportunity."

- participant in Nanaimo

"I know that one school system cannot satisfy everyone, but I believe we can have a variety of learning styles . . ."

- participant in Kelowna

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Youth are eager for more input into both what and how they learn. The classroom environment is also seen as vitally important. Time and time again, participants reiterated the need for a personal, friendly relationship with their teacher.

Although many teachers are innovative and involve their students, participants complained that others continue to use the traditional, lecture-based classroom format which they feel stifles discussion and creativity. They were tired of being talked *at*, rather than talked *with*.

Student suggestions for altering the format of their classes were often disregarded. Youth felt that they are not listened to or respected; in this respect, schools mirror their experiences in the world at large. There were a few troubling incidents told of teachers who were disinterested, abusive in their language, or even violent.

56% of graduates surveyed in 1991 said that secondary school teachers did a good job of actively involving them in their learning . . .

(Ministry of Education Annual Report, 1990/91)[44]

TEACHERS AS FACILITATORS OF LEARNING

Essential to any change to education is a new relationship between teachers/administrators and students. The classroom needs to become a place where teachers are facilitators of learning, giving students direction, purpose, and guidance. Students should be allowed to explore and achieve on their own, with the support of the classroom teacher.

There is often little recognition of those teachers who "go the extra mile" for their students. Participants in the forums suggested that their schools hold teacher recognition days to acknowledge the contributions of dedicated teachers.

GREATER RANGE OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Participants recommended a much broader range of classroom activities, with much more group work, integration of subjects in projects, opportunities to teach younger students, and community involvement.

School trips and student exchanges were also given high ratings. Participants felt that there was too much emphasis on academic achievement in deciding who would participate in these activities. They pointed out that this is discouraging for other students, who work hard but

don't get the top grades. They felt that many more students would benefit from these opportunities.

What did you dislike most about school?

Teaching methods	**40%**
Teachers	**39%**
Can't do what you want	**31%**
Too much work	**26%**
Your course(s)	**23%**
Class size	**20%**
Drugs	**19%**
Activities outside of class	**5%**
Friends	**4%**
Popularity	**4%**
Stability	**4%**
Other	**4%**
Free time	**3%**
Socializing	**3%**

(*Dropping Out and Dropping In*, Canadian Youth Foundation, 1991)[45]

INDIVIDUALIZATION OF LEARNING

They also highlighted flexibility. Students should have the opportunity to learn in different ways, based on their own learning style, and at their own speed.

Individual help for those students who need it should be available from teachers and peer tutors. Students who are capable of working more independently should have the opportunity to do so, while more structured teaching should be available for those students who require it.

Flexible school attendance hours were recommended in several forums. Youth suggested that school be open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., with students given flexibility to attend at the hours most convenient to them. Students who are working and teen parents should be able to adjust their courseload and hours to suit their schedules. A course credit system where students take as many courses as they wish or can handle was suggested.

Some participants felt there should be more alternate schools, but most argued that the regular school system needs to adopt some of the flexibility, caring and sense of community that young people find in these schools. Creating innovative programs, e.g., "Beyond the Walls" (Immaculata Secondary School, Kelowna) within a regular school was also recommended.

Rather than asking students to fit into the school, schools should create programs and structures which fit the needs of the students.

GRADES

Grades are emphasized too much in the schools, participants felt. They would like their marks to reflect participation, cooperation and effort as well as academic performance. Final exams should not be worth more than 20% of the final grade. Concern

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Reaching the Summit

The Summit Program at Oak Bay Secondary School is piloting The New Youth Challenge Network, a self-directed learning project which encourages each student to discover a personalized approach to learning. Breaking away from formal, teacher-directed learning to a more natural and personalized experience requires training in such skills as time management and self-evaluation. Students use the Pathways model designed by Dr. Maurice Gibbons as a guide to learning.

Gibbons' well-known paper Walkabout identifies the five areas of human endeavor which traditionally captivate adolescents: adventure challenge, logical enquiry, practical skills, creative arts and community service.

The Summit program is designed to meet the needs of high risk students who have not been succesful in traditional schooling environments. Students have chosen projects in the fields of mountaineering, scuba diving, photography, sailing, community service, dance woodwork, food preparation, video-production, and voice recording. Experts have happily volunteered to create support groups to bolster the self-esttem of kids who are pioneering new and exciting pathways toward a productive and fulfilling future.

(Adapted from B.C. Youth, Summer 1991)[46]

was expressed about giving all group members the same mark for a project. Contribution of each team member to the project should be recognized, possibly by asking team members to rate themselves and others on their cooperation and contribution.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER TRAINING

Youth acknowledged that these changes would have many implications for teacher workloads and training. Teachers already in the schools should have access to professional development to prepare them for their new roles as facilitators.

University teacher education programs should be updated to prepare teachers for this dramatically different "classroom." emphasizing skills of facilitating learning. Selection criteria for entrance to university education programs should be adjusted to ensure that those accepted really want to teach. Ample experience must be built into teacher education so that new teachers have the practical skills, as well as the theoretical knowledge. A number of youth expressed concern that new teachers' salaries were too low, discouraging good applicants.

Several participants commented that many newly trained teachers were already adopting this new relationship with their students.

These teachers are seen as wanting to teach and likely to treat their students with respect. They are also willing to allow students to make mistakes and be wrong sometimes.

CLASS SIZES

Class sizes need to be small enough to allow personal interaction between students and teachers. Para-professionals may be required to assist in the supervision of practical projects, coordinate work placements, and recordkeeping.

PROBLEMS OF REMOTE RURAL SCHOOLS

Concern was expressed by students from some small, remote secondary schools about the lack of experience and the short tenure of many of the teachers in their schools. They felt that these teachers, so fresh out of teacher training, were unprepared for a small school, with only a few students in each grade. As a result of their inexperience, they are unable to control classroom behavior.

The range of course work which these teachers are expected to handle is too great. The distance education materials used are uninteresting and contribute to discipline problems.

Career planning in smaller, remote schools is difficult because of the relatively small number of career examples in the surrounding

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Bird's Eye View Bella Coola Country

Using Landsat satellite imagery and historic aerial photos, students at Alexander MacKenzie Secondary School found logging, diking, and road construction have contributed to a decrease in salmon spawning in the Bella Coola watershed.

As part of an ongoing school project, students Ethan Barnett, Randi Hilland, Clint Nelson, Jenni Hall and Alana Jones, also went into the field to study changes in salmon spawning habits, sediment loads and flooding patterns in the Bella Coola River.

The students visited hatcheries, protected habitat, and logging and replanting sites to learn more about complex environmental issues.

"The project has made me aware of the environment, of the effects of clearcut logging. It's interesting to see how the area has changed over time," says Ethan, now in his second year on the project.

In phase two, the students will build a database using information they have gathered, and construct a model to show how future logging could affect the watershed.

Project Coordinator/Founder Karl Osmers says this is the project's long-term goal. The information could then be sent to the Ministry of Forests so logging plans might be modified to lessen environmental impact.

The project received assistance from a Youth Grant, and has been so successful that local businesses helped fund it. It also got some deserved recognition when Ethan and Karl were invited by Landsat's manufacturer, EOSAT of Maryland, USA, to present their project at the Ministry of Forest-sponsored Interim Symposium in Fall 1990. The symposium was attended by experts from 33 countries.

(Adapted from B.C. Youth, Winter 90/91)[47]

community. As a result, students in these schools have even less knowledge about careers than other students.

Pursuing careers which require post-secondary education almost inevitably means leaving their home community, a difficult decision to contemplate for a young person with little experience of living in a larger centre. It is little wonder, then, that so many youth in these towns are unmotivated and see little point in continuing with school.

Students from remote communities had few answers to their problems. However, it is clear that remote schools have unique needs and that both staff and students in these communities need assistance to deal with these problems.

LABELLING OF STUDENTS

Great concern was expressed about the labelling that takes place in school. Assumptions are also made about students based on their appearance or dress.

Some youth spoke of being labelled as "stupid" or "dumb" when they had an undiagnosed learning disability. They recommended that additional training or professional development be available to assist school district staff in identifying these problems. While most participants were supportive of special services available to learning disabled or special needs students, they felt it was important that these programs not be used to label students, or discourage them from reaching as high and as far as they can.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Greater access to and use of technology was recommended. Students should be able to use a computer on a daily basis for practical purposes, such as completing class assignments or homework. Interactive video, multi-media technology and satellite link-up for distance education learners were also suggested as a way to make learning more appealing and active. The use of drama, simulations, and resources modelled on computer games was also recommended.

Between 1987 and 1991 the number of computers in B.C. schools rose from 21,000 to 39,000.

In B.C. in 1990, there were 7.7 computers for every 100 students.

(Ministry of Education Annual Report, 1990/91)[48]

RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.13 **Students should have the opportunity to learn at their own pace and in different ways based on their own learning style. They should be able to choose from a range of possible learning activities.**

2.14 **Access to exchange programs should be improved, with greater opportunities created for all students.**

2.15 **A pilot project should be established to determine the feasibility of extended school days, with flexible hours of attendance.**

2.16 **University teacher education programs should be updated to prepare teachers for the Year 2000 program, and to increase the amount of practical experience built into the programs.**

2.17 **Criteria for acceptance into faculties of education should be adjusted to ensure that potential teachers have an interest and aptitude for working with young people.**

2.18 **School districts, the B.C. Teachers' Federation (BCTF), and the Ministry of Education should examine the structure of pay scales for teachers to ensure that new teachers are adequately recompensed.**

2.19 **School districts, the BCTF, and the Ministry of Education should examine the issues of class size and the possibilities of increasing the use of para-professionals in the classroom, in order to ensure that all students get the individual attention they require.**

2.20 **Through partnership agreements with business, schools should ensure that all students have regular ongoing access to computers for classroom use and homework assignments.**

2.21 **Satellite link-ups between schools in different parts of Canada or the world, videodisc and laser disc interactive programs, computer-assisted learning, and other forms of technology should be better utilized in all schools.**

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Participants saw the social and physical environment of school as a key element in a satisfying and productive school life. Many students move from school to school, and from one neighbourhood to another. As a result, large numbers of students do not have a group of friends with whom they have attended school since kindergarten.

"Often this withdrawal occurred during the transition to high school which was described by most school leavers as very difficult. Similarly, a change in school necessitated by a move of the family could initiate this process of withdrawal. Many reported difficulty making friends or becoming involved in school activities. Clubs and teams in high school were reported to be more competitive in high school. One has to try out for these activities. Some school leavers reported trying to get involved and failing, while other school leavers reported never attempting to join activities."

(*Qualitative Research on School Leavers*, Statistics Canada, 1990)[49]

Socializing and learning interpersonal skills are often the most satisfying part of a student's school experience, but those students who are new to the school, who are different, or who are new Canadians, often feel excluded from the community. Cliques and groups distinguished by their dress or taste in music (headbangers, industrialists, heavy metal, preppies) develop in schools, creating discord and animosity.

BUILDING A SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Youth felt that it was essential to create an increased sense of belonging among all the members of the school community, including students, teachers, staff and administrators. There should be school conference days, where everyone has the opportunity to meet and get to know others. Theme days focusing on a particular issue or activity (cultural heritage, environment, careers, etc.) were also suggested as a way of building school pride.

All school assemblies should involve a broad cross section of the school population in the program. The cultural background of the students attending the school should be reflected in school activities and clubs.

Orientation days and a buddy system for new students were

recommended to ensure that students felt comfortable in their new school environment as quickly as possible. Teacher advisor and homeroom periods were also suggested as ways of building a sense of community among students and staff.

25% of Canadian males and 27% of Canadian females aged 15 say that there are "one" or "several" students they fear.

(*The Health of Canada's Youth*, Health and Welfare Canada, 1992)[50]

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Extra-curricular activities form an important part of school life. Students felt that there was too great an emphasis on team sports, to the exclusion of many other activities. They suggested that more than one tier of sports teams be available, to allow participation in sports by those less athletically gifted.

Some youth were concerned by the lack of support for girls teams, and suggested that sports teams be integrated. Individual sports, aerobics, fitness, dance, leadership, hobbies, pingpong, and foosball were suggested as club activities that should be available. Music rooms and art classrooms could be opened for individuals to practise and have fun.

RULES AND DISCIPLINE

There should be much more involvement by students in the development of school rules and disciplinary procedures. Youth suggested that all students have input into the development of school rules. Students complained that some rules are degrading, e.g. only allowing bathroom breaks at certain times, or requiring students to carry large bathroom break signs.

Disputes and disciplinary problems should be handled by a committee with representation from administration, teachers, parents and students. There should be weekly student teacher discussions about progress, problems and issues; these should include, but not be restricted to disciplinary issues.

Many participants commented on what they saw to be inappropriate punishments. Keeping students out of class or sending them to the office for missing class or being late is seen as contradictory to the purpose of the punishment (i.e. students being kept out of class to encourage them to get to class). Punishment in school is perceived as being inconsistent and sometimes unfairly applied. The participants suggested emphasizing and rewarding positive behavior rather than focusing so much on punishing bad behavior.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The physical environment of the school also has a dramatic impact

on school spirit and on the pride an individual feels in attending. Frequently, youth reported that schools were drab, uninviting and depressing places that were poorly maintained.

They recommended that cheerful, bright colours be used in painting schools, both inside and out. Murals, student artwork and crafts should be used to decorate hallways and classrooms.

A graffiti wall, which is regularly repainted or has new paper applied to create a fresh surface, should be available for students to write on. This would reduce the amount of graffiti which appears in other parts of the school.

REFLECTING CULTURAL HERITAGE OF STUDENTS

The decoration of the school, inside and out, should reflect the cultural heritage of the students attending. A totem pole, or a housefront design created by native students would be an appropriate way of recognizing the native heritage of the students attending one school, whereas designs reflecting Chinese or Indian culture may be more appropriate in other schools.

SPACES FOR SOCIALIZING AND EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

The design of outdoor spaces is also important. As well as fields for

A Step in the Right Direction ...

H.A.P. empowers Nanaimo students

The Healthy Attitudes Program at John Barsby Secondary School is a great example of student empowerment. In cooperation with teachers and health professionals, students are enhancing school health.

The HAP committee was formed in October 1990. This year, committee member Stephen Perrott says that interest is building.

"It has made everyone realize they're more in control of their surroundings," he says, "so they put out more effort."

Students choose the most important topics to tackle to create a healthier school environment: timetable adjustments to include activity hours for intramurals, club meetings and help with courses; more hot and nutritious foods and extended hours of operation in the cafeteria; improvements to the looks/facilities of the school; and increased interpersonal communication between students, staff and parents.

"We changed the buzzer," says Stephen. "It used to be annoying; now it sounds like a phone ringing."

The committee is also working to get a study hall in the mornings in the cafeteria, so students won't have to sit on the floor in the hallways. "Also if they open the cafeteria, it will give people a chance to eat breakfast if there was no time at home for a meal," Stephen says.

HAP is also planning an art contest to find someone to paint a mural in the cafeteria. Bulletin board displays brighten the school surroundings and provide information on topics such as: HAP, activity hours, health, multiculturalism, and community contacts.

"Now there is more student interest because they realize they had input into it," Stephen says. "It was the turning point."

(Adapted from B.C. Youth, Winter 91/92)[51]

sports, youth would like outdoor gardens, benches and courtyard areas for socializing at breaks, or holding an occasional outdoor class on sunny days.

Schools should include comfortable cafeterias and lounges where students can socialize. Healthy, interesting and appetizing foods which reflect the tastes and cultural backgrounds of the students should be available. These foods could be prepared by students preparing for employment in food services.

Space for student council activities, peer counselling, school clubs and small group work is also needed.

BUILDING NEW SCHOOLS

When new schools are built, the use of natural lighting, either through large windows or skylights was recommended. Plans should avoid long, narrow hallways. Concourses, areas for information kiosks, displays, etc., should be part of the school facility. Many youth suggested that community colleges and universities have much more stimulating and interesting designs which should be emulated when building new schools.

Several people suggested combining the school with a youth or community centre on one site as a way of providing more options for recreation and socializing without extra cost.

BELLS AND BUZZERS

Another annoyance was the bells and buzzers typically found in schools. Students often felt that their schools looked like prisons, and the bells made them seem more so. Simply replacing the bells with music would improve the school environment.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING

Young people attending the forums would like greater input in the decision-making about their school. Purchasing of equipment, input into the design of a new school or renovation of an existing school, planning artwork or murals for school walls were mentioned as areas where youth could make a valuable contribution. When involved in the decision-making process, youth were willing to work on projects or help fundraise to bring these plans to fruition.

"Most schools look like penitentiaries . . . The bells make them sound like prisons."

- participant in Prince Rupert

RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.22 Schools should create an increased sense of community amongst its students and staff by implementing policies and activities which give each member of the school the opportunity to know others on a personal basis and feel valued as a contributor to the school. Such activities could include: school conference days, school assemblies, events and activities reflecting the cultural heritage of students, orientation days, buddy systems, teacher advisors and home room periods.

2.23 Extra-curricular activities should be recognized as an important part of the school experience. Cooperative relationships with youth workers in recreation departments should be pursued in order to provide a broader range of extra-curricular activities and to ensure that all students have an opportunity to engage in activities that interest them, and help them develop a healthy and active lifestyle.

2.24 Schools should model a cooperative and participatory style of management by actively involving staff, teachers, parents, and students in the development of rules and procedures, settlement of disputes, purchase of equipment, hours of service and menus in school cafeterias and planning for renovations and new buildings.

2.25 The architecture and decor of schools (new or renovated) should be bright and appealing, should recognize the cultural heritage of the students, provide space for students to carry out peer helping and student government activities, and provide cafeterias and other areas where students can socialize between classes.

"[We] need an increased sense of belonging to school, therefore, [we] need students more involved in decisions regarding the school."

- participant in Burnaby

SUPPORT PROGRAMS AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Counselling services were a big issue for youth attending the forums. Many felt that the counselling available in their schools was inadequate. Counsellors are often inadequately trained for the range of tasks they are expected to carry out and have too large a work load. Youth were concerned whether their conversations would be held in confidence, and frightened that other students and teachers might hear of their problem.

40% of Canadian high school students claim they have "a great deal" or "quite a bit" of confidence overall in their guidance counsellors.

25% of students found counsellors helpful with personal problems, versus 70% with selecting courses, and 60% with education and career planning.

Less than 1% said they would seek out a counsellor when facing a serious problem or seeking guidance on moral decisions.

(*Canada's Youth "Ready for Today"*, Canadian Youth Foundation, 1987)[52]

Students feel that they would find it easier to talk to a teacher with whom they have established a friendly relationship, than a counsellor, whom they might never have seen.

MOVING RESOURCES INTO THE SCHOOLS

Some of the problems which youth today face clearly call for resources beyond the scope of a school counsellor. Yet youth are often poorly informed about the resources available in their community, or find it difficult to access them due to transportation problems or lack of money to pay for the assistance.

Because youth find it difficult to communicate with their parents, they may feel unable to discuss a problem with them prior to going to a counsellor. Parents may be unwilling or unable to pay for professional help.

These factors all support the participants' contention that health, mental health and substance abuse resources should be available to them in the school. This does not mean that the school district should necessarily provide these services itself, but that other community agencies should have closer links with the schools, bringing their services to students rather than always expecting youth to come to them. At the very least, improved, youth-oriented information on health,

mental health, substance abuse treatment and other youth services should be prominently displayed.

TEEN PARENTS

Teen parents have some special needs. Lack of money, lack of support from parents and friends, pressures of full-time parents, limited access to affordable, quality daycare, and limited parenting skills are some of the problems they deal with, in addition to the usual concerns of youth.

For these young parents - mostly young mothers - daycare and other support services are essential for their success at school. These services need to be available nearby, so that young parents can visit their children during the day, and so that they are not spending hours they don't have travelling on public transit.

PEER COUNSELLING

Peer counselling and peer support programs were mentioned time and time again. Many young people feel more comfortable confiding in another youth, rather than an adult. Often adults are perceived as not understanding the pressures and concerns facing youth today. A peer can provide support and encouragement to seek assistance to deal with the problem. Peer counselling and support programs need support from the counsellors and administration to be effective. Peer counsellors need to be visible in the school community, organizing awareness sessions, helping with timetable conflicts, and meeting their fellow students so that a trusting relationship is established. They require training, ongoing refresher courses and debriefing sessions, all of which require a commitment on the part of the school administration and counselling staff to support student involvement.

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Peer helping programs at Lillooet Secondary

A "peer helping" program begun at Lillooet Secondary School in 1989 has proved very successful and continues to expand dramatically. Currently, 41 peer helpers, 20 teachers and 10 parents are actively involved in assisting a wide variety of students to improve their self-esteem and academic achievement. Aside from helping to orientate new students coming into the school, the program also contributes hands-on assistance to meet the day-to-day demands of special needs students. Extra funding from the Healthy Schools project has meant that 15 peer helpers can receive specialty training in developing listening skills, how to respond to others, developing leadership characteristics and how to communicate effectively. Not only has this program been a great boon to those students receiving its services, but the peer helpers - and even the general school population - have learned valuable lessons in what the word "community" really means.

(Healthy Schools Update, Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, Spring 1992)[53]

SCHOOL - COMMUNITY INTERACTION

Schools are part of the larger community and yet often are perceived to be separate from it. Participants were convinced that bringing the community into the school and the school into the community would have a profound effect on the relevance of education and the health of students.

Youth found it difficult to discuss their school experiences and personal concerns with their parents, yet they were anxious to have their parents more involved. They suggested that parents could be much more active in the schools, as learners themselves, as resource persons discussing careers, as assistants with class activities and as participants with their sons and daughters in communication workshops. Youth suggested that parent/teacher meetings which include the student, would better resolve any problems the youth is having with school.

INVOLVEMENT OF BUSINESS

Businesses also should play a much larger role in their community's schools. They can provide interesting and challenging work placements for students and provide resource people to discuss career options, labour market needs, and employment standards with students. They can provide real-life projects and equipment for students to work with.

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Teen Mums take high school honours

When pregnant teens in Langley expressed a need to continue their studies, the community responded with an initiative called "Learning for Life."

Learning for Life is a partnership involving the teen parents, the local Public Health Unit, Planned Parenthood, Family Services, and the local school district. Planned Parenthood helps by providing counselling on the options and services available to teens; Family Services sponsors a Pregnant Teen Support Group which offers peer support and counselling on all aspects of pregnancy, delivery, and infant care.

The school district contributes to the program by providing a half-time school counsellor who offers life skills training and support for teen parents at Aldergrove Secondary School. The school also provides facilities for the Totem Day Care Centre, which looks after the infants during school hours.

Since the program began in 1988, the teen parents have achieved outstanding success in completing their high school education. Even with the extra responsibility of parenting while attending school, 23 percent of the mothers are on the honour roll, compared to 24 percent for the general school population.

Many school districts in British Columbia are involved in incentives to support teen parents in continuing their education. These initiatives are helping to promote the health of families and are based on the understanding of the important link between educational achievement and health.

(Health Promotion in Action, Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, Spring 1992)[54]

As employers of students, they can help keep youth in school by being understanding of exam schedules and school requirements and providing incentives for their employees to stay in school and pursue post-secondary education. Youth suggested that area businesses reward their student employees who improve their academic standing by awarding a small increase in pay or a bursary upon graduation.

LINKS WITH POLICE, SENIORS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

The police department could be involved in preventive programs geared toward traffic safety, self-defence and substance abuse prevention. Other community professionals might be involved as guest speakers or resource people.

Other parts of the community can also be linked with the local secondary school. Elementary school students could benefit from having high school students teach a class or provide tutorial help as an assignment for a course. Seniors could assist youth in understanding the traditions of a particular ethnic group or the history of the community. In turn, students could carry out class projects for seniors in the community.

Youth want to be contributing members of their communities. In turn, they want the respect and recognition of the community as active players in shaping their own futures. In playing an active role, young people will develop the skills, self-confidence and self-esteem to become healthy, competent adults.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.26 In cooperation with local health departments, municipal governments, local offices of the Ministries of Health and Social Services and other appropriate agencies, schools should ensure that programs and services related to physical and mental health, and substance abuse services are readily available to youth in their secondary schools.

2.27 Every school district in the province should implement peer counselling programs, especially at the junior and senior secondary level. The Ministry of Education should provide resources for the training, ongoing development, and supervision of these programs.

2.28 All school districts, in cooperation with local health units, Family Services, Planned Parenthood, and other appropriate agencies, should provide flexible educational programs, daycare and support services to assist young parents to complete their schooling.

2.29 School counsellors should have greater access to professional development. Topics dealt with might include career counselling methods, counselling skills updates and current youth issues.

2.30 All schools should become community schools, actively involving parents, businesses, community groups and seniors as learners and resource persons. Parents should be more actively involved as partners in their children's education, especially at the junior and senior secondary level.

2.31 Businesses should implement incentive programs to encourage their student employees to complete school and pursue post-secondary education.

2.32 Police departments should establish liaison agreements with local elementary and secondary schools, and become key participants in the development and delivery of preventive programs related to:

- traffic safety;
- abuse, e.g. self-defence courses, security escorts, self-protection techniques, and community awareness;
- substance abuse, e.g. awareness programs, dry grad programs, and drug-free youth activities; and
- crime prevention.

"[There is] not enough personal, direct involvement in school. School is too passive, which doesn't allow for increased self-esteem."

- participant in Nanaimo

RECREATION/LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

Almost every youth and his/her parents can relate to the statement "There's nothing to do ..." Many of the participants at the Youth Talks forums came just to discuss this subject. Almost invariably, the small groups discussions identified the lack of recreational opportunities for youth as a key issue in their community. Council members assumed that the needs might differ widely from community to community, depending on what services were already available.

However, what young people said about recreation opportunities was remarkably similar in every forum. What was generally offered in their communities was highly structured recreation programs, generally based on team sports, organized by adults. Many participants commented that there were lots of activities for those under 12 and over 19, but few for those between 12 and 19.

Friendship and music are two areas of great enjoyment; yet few recreation centres provide an environment in which young people can spend time listening to music and talking to their friends. What participants wanted, was programs which are less structured, offering opportunities for fun, socializing, and varied activities, planned and carried out by youth. Adult coordination was welcome, as long as youth were respected and involved in the process.

Other problems which influenced ability to participate in recreation were transportation, affordability, and lack of information. Lack of skills and lack of equipment may also be a concern, especially when planning outdoor recreation activities, such as rock climbing, hiking and camping.

When youth lack positive, interesting outlets for their energy, they may turn to less socially desirable activities. Participants in the forums repeatedly attributed some of the problems in their communities to lack of recreation alternatives. Hanging out at local stores, street corners or malls, vandalism, drunk driving, minor crimes and sexual experimentation, were identified as some of the outcomes of having "nothing to do".

Young people want a place where they are expected and welcome. They are looking for meaningful involvement in the community and for activities which broaden their skills.

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Port Coquitlam has hot line to teen recreation needs

Who are the real experts in recreation programming for teens? The teens themselves.

That's why the Port Coquitlam Parks and Recreation Department decided to get teens involved in program planning. The department formed an Advisory Teen committee which is open to all Port Coquitlam teens. The committee, made up on average of over 20 teen advocates, meets regularly with Parks and Recreation staff to help plan and evaluate the department's recreation programs for teens.

The results of the teens' involvement are apparent at the Hyde Creek Recreation Centre in Port Coquitlam where the atmosphere is definitely "teen friendly." The centre has a "Teen Hot Line" which keeps young people up-to-date on activities and programs such as monthly Teen Dances, overnight camping trips, a three-stage leadership program, the Friday Party Machine and Advisory Teen Committee meetings.

In addition to program planning, the committee helps organize special events such as the "Day of Fun", a popular community event for four to ten year olds which had over 600 participants last year.

Port Coquitlam's award-winning "On the Move" program is another example of the municipality's innovative approach. Although teen girls wanted to get involved in physical activity to improve their health, most weren't interested in the usual competitive sports programs. The solution was a weekly informal volleyball "get-together" for girls aged 13 to 17.

The group, which averages about 20 to 30 girls, has recently expanded into other activities such as floor hockey and indoor soccer.

(Adapted from Health Promotion in Action, Office of Health Promotion, Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, Spring 1992)[55]

"Lack of recreational opportunities for youth causes destructive rather than constructive leisure . . ."

- participant in Nanaimo

"People are always complaining about teens being where no one wants them."

- participant in Nanaimo

PROGRAMING AND SERVICES

IMPROVING EXISTING PROGRAMS

Participants attending the forums repeatedly emphasized that the programs and services currently offered by recreation centres did not meet their needs. The key, they felt, to ensuring that programs do meet their needs is to have input from the youth themselves into the programs and services.

Youth indicated that they wanted to engage in activities with their close peer group most of the time. Programs should be established which have a focus on youth between 12 and 15; others should be open to older teens. Older teens often enjoy acting as a leader for younger teens or children.

Participants noted that many youth are not athletically inclined and are not interested in competitive sports. Some of the outdoor recreation activities suggested were canoeing, hiking, horseback riding and camping. Many youth attending the forums expressed a preference for relaxed, non-competitive sports activities. Centres could sponsor drop-in sports nights for floor hockey or basketball, with an opportunity for youth to socialize afterward.

Contrary to popular belief, youth are also interested in more educational activities. Suggestions included inter-city meetings or conferences between youth, workshops on life skills, job training, leadership training and creative writing or literature. Environmental education programs, intramural activities and inter-cultural awareness workshops held in conjunction with schools were also considered as excellent ways of improving youth recreation.

Issues in Order of Priority:

- **Lack of age-appropriate and appealing activities and facilities for teens**
- **Lack of age-appropriate and appealing communication and information on existing facilities and activities for youth**
- **Not enough opportunities for youth to be heard**
- **Failure to nurture the creative and problem-solving potential in youth**
- **Little non-structured leisure opportunities for youth**
- **Lack of transportation within the community**

(*Community Share Forum for Youth Report*, City of White Rock, 1991)[56]

Youth drama allows individuals to express their feelings and emotions in an alternative environment. Many youth would be interested in theatre particularly if they were given the opportunity to explore issues relevant to them. Participants saw great potential in allowing youth to write and perform their own plays in front of local audiences.

Popular Youth Leisure Activities:

Hangout with friends	**68%**
Read/watch TV	**66%**
Invite friends home	**53%**
Go to movies	**53%**
Go to dances	**47%**
Walk/bike/jog	**46%**
Play non-competitive or individual sport	**45%**
Go to restaurants	**43%**
Swim/other watersports	**40%**
Volunteer	**36%**
Play competitive team sports	**33%**
Belong to a club	**30%**
Play arcade games	**9%**

(Post-forum evaluation, Youth Talks, May 1992)[57]

Youth art galleries either in local schools or recreation centres were also suggested. Giving youth a forum to display their artistic talents would help promote confidence and pride in their creative abilities. Rehearsal space for young musicians was also needed, particularly in areas with a lot of multi-family housing.

In addition, these centres could offer movie nights, teen dances, and video games. Youth desired a safe, comfortable environment in which they could interact and socialize with other young people, perhaps over a cup of coffee or a soft drink.

In the post-forum evaluation, participants were asked to identify what they like to do with their leisure time. Hanging out with friends was the single-most popular activity, followed closely by reading or watching television. Inviting friends home, going to the movies, dances, or restaurants were not far behind. It is noteworthy that most of these activities involve socializing with other youth.

Playing competitive team sports lagged far behind, with only 33% of youth engaging in this activity. Forty-five percent play Individual and non-competitive sports. The most popular physical activity was walking, bike riding or jogging (46%).

HOURS OF OPERATION

Existing community centres are often not open when young people would want them to be. Participants in the Chilliwack forum commented that recreation centres closed at 9 p.m; Especially on the weekend, young people would like later hours. Sometimes, centres are closed to youth at nine, even when programming for adults continues much later.

Participants recommended that centres be open to youth later in the evenings especially on Friday and Saturday evenings.

CONNECTING YOUTH TO COMMUNITY RESOURCES

These centres could connect young people with information on a range of topics including health, nutrition, sex education, employment, and family and personal problems. Counselling and peer counselling were often identified as services that youth would like to see offered. By working with municipal governments and schools to help provide such resources as community health nurses, nutritionists and counsellors and peer counsellors, the teen centres could enhance their role as active, positive participants in the community.

A further role for youth centres, one based on their image of providing a safe, socially interactive environment, was to offer outreach services for street youth, immigrant youth, runaways and abused children. While the centre may not be able to provide certain resources, such as sleeping accommodations, they could offer the information on resources for these troubled youth.

A Step in the Right Direction ...

"ROCKS on a roll

Like Norm, Cliff and other stars of the hit TV comedy Cheers, most people wouldn't mind "getting away to a place where everybody knows your name." Such a place exists for Kelowna's youth. However, it's not a bar (or even a place), but rather an organization known as ROCKS (Recreation Organizing Committee of Kelowna Students).

The concept of this fun-loving, proactive youth group originated in 1984 with Dennis Zahara, a recreation programmer working with the City of Kelowna Recreation Services Department. The idea of having a community-wide youth club was not a new one, but modelled after youth committees known as "Teen Towns" which flourished around the late 60s and early 70s. Dennis had stumbled on a remarkable phenomenon; with a little help, teens were actually prepared to do things for themselves.

Since the first inter-school ROCKS committee put on its very first event, the "Battle of the Sexes Games", it has hosted many other successful events. These include teen dances, gigs/concerts, ski trips , snowshoe retreats, overnight houseboat cruises, camping trips, treasure hunts, car rallies, barbeques, exchange trips, toboggan parties, hikes, leadership conferences and just lately, the Demented Games. ROCKS has also had some not-so-successful events like the 13th Bad Luck Pool Party Dance, but fortunately the constitution and bank account can subsidize the odd event that loses money. More importantly, ROCKS provides a real opportunity for teens to learn how to organize events for themselves and other Kelowna teens.

(Adapted from an article submitted by Dennis Zahara, June 1992)[58]

FACILITIES

Throughout the forum Teen/Youth Centres were often proposed. While participants did not necessarily see such centres as a panacea for all the problems of youth recreation, they did see them as one solution to the recreation needs of young people.

Youth gave examples of youth centres that were operating effectively such as Club Metro in Burnaby and the Creston Valley Youth Centre. Other participants favoured incorporating youth programming within existing recreation centres, as is done in Kelowna and Kamloops, provided that youth involvement in the operation of the programs could be ensured.

The advantage of a separate youth centre is that it is starting fresh. There is no previous history. Staff can be hired who have the willingness to work with young people. There are no worries about disturbing other users of the centre or compromising hours of service to youth to satisfy other groups. Youth have no preconceptions about what programs they can expect or what attitude staff and other users will have about their presence.

The chief disadvantage is that there is no facility or base of funding. The cost of a new or renovated building may be more than the community can support. Existing facilities and equipment in the community may not be used to their capacity. Transportation to a single location may be a problem for youth.

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Lower Mainland teens flock to Club Metro

An official opening ceremony of Club Metro Youth Centre, organized and hosted by youth, was attended by about 250 people of all ages. Events included an open gamesroom, free video games, dunk tank, barbeque and giveaways. The first three months of operation saw nearly 1700 visits by teens to the centre and another 120 involved in summer programs. About 250 to 300 young people had used the centre and 120 were signed up as members.

The centre, located in an old school building near the Metrotown Mall has been renovated and equipped by the Burnaby Parks and Recreation Department with the assistance of the Youth Grants program and contributions from local businesses. Some of the activities available included camping, gamesroom tournaments, movies, rapelling, leadership development, fundraising, public speaking and supervision of the centre.

One of the most exciting events was a volunteer/fundraising project at Oakalla Prison. With support from businesses like Coca-Cola and Polaroid, the teens operated a "Get your photo in death row" booth, ran a concession, and sold authentic prison bricks.

The centre is bringing badly needed resources to youth in a more efficient and meaningful manner through its newly-developed youth services model. Health nurses and alcohol and drug workers are now regularly visiting the centre to provide information, assistance and referrals. What the centre is attempting to do is bring the services to the place where many of these young people are most comfortable - their youth centre.

The centre is planning an appreciation evening to thank all of the businesses, community groups, and organizations who have supported Club Metro.

(Based on reports submitted by Club Metro, October 1991 and March 1992)[59]

In addition, segregrating youth in a youth centre may cause further alienation from the community as a whole unless careful planning is done to ensure that community interaction takes place.

The local recreation centre may offer specialized facilities and equipment, but may not have the space for youth to socialize. All these factors should be taken into consideration when deciding how recreation services for youth should be organized in the community. Youth and other recreation facility users should be consulted in this process.

Participants recommended that schools be better utilized to serve recreation needs. Schools are ideal locations for after school activities because the youth are already there. In planning new schools, combining school and recreation facilities on a single site was recommended as a means of serving the recreation needs of students better.

Due to its popularity amongst youth and the controversy it has created in many communities, skateboarding was discussed in many small groups. Skateboarding is both a sport and a form of transportation for some youth. Bans on skateboarding were perceived as a form of discrimination against youth. Participants recommended youth be consulted in developing a skateboarding action plan, which could include building skateboarding bowls or designating areas for use by skateboarders.

A final problem with facilities noted by many youth, was renting space for community dances. Many community facilities are reluctant to rent to young people or to have young people as the patrons of a dance.

PUBLICIZING YOUTH PROGRAMS

Many youth were unaware of the services offered by their local community or recreation centres. The brochures used to publicize recreation centre programs are often unappealing to youth. To address this problem, participants suggested that newsletters highlighting the activities and services for youth be produced by young people working with the centre.

Transportation used to access leisure activities

Own vehicle	**10.69%**
Family car	**32.08%**
Friend's car	**16.83%**
Bus	**20.59%**
Bicycle	**35.64%**
Walk	**30.50%**
No answer	**2.77%**

(*Youth as a Solution: A Basis for Discussion*, Surrey Youth Task Force, 1991)[60]

TRANSPORTATION

Bus transportation is often lacking, offers poor service or shuts

down much too early for youth to get into town for a program. Young people in outlying areas, who do not have a driver's licence, are often dependent on parents driving them to activities. Older youth may not have access to a vehicle, even if they are licenced to drive. Bicycling may be difficult in inclement weather, especially in northern communities.

What kind of transportation do you use most often?

Family vehicle	**30.5%**
Bicycle	**26.5%**
Walk	**26.5%**
Own car	**8.7%**
Bus	**6.0%**
Friend's car	**3.6%**
Skateboard	**1.8%**
Combinations	**3.7%**
Other	**1.9%**

(*Youth Matters*, Mayor's Committee on Youth, Report to the City of Prince George, 1989)[61]

COST BARRIERS

Many appealing activities are just too expensive for young people with limited incomes. For example, rock concerts routinely cost $30 to $40 per ticket. Even movies cost $6 to $8. When transportation, parking and refreshments are added, they are often out of reach for youth.

Unlike their younger siblings, teens generally do not have recreation programs paid for. Therefore, the cost of attending a program can be a real constraint. Most youth expected to pay a small membership fee to belong to a youth centre. They were also prepared to assist in fund-raising for special events and activities.

In the post-forum evaluations, participants were asked several questions regarding recreation. One of the questions asked how much the participants could afford to spend on all leisure activities during a month.

53.1% of the youth who responded to the questions had $30 or less to spend on all recreational activities during the month. With bus fare and a snack, a single movie can use one-third of their total recreation budget. If a centre wishes to attract a broad cross-section of the youth

How much can you afford to spend on all recreational and leisure activities in one month?

Under $10	**10.5%**
$11 - $20	**24.1%**
$21 - $30	**17.5%**
$31 - $40	**15.4%**
$41 - $50	**8.3%**
Over $50	**24.1%**

(Post-forum evaluation, Youth Talks, May 1992)[62]

population, the maximum monthly fee that could be charged is probably $10 or less. Respondents reported having about the same amount of money to spend on leisure activities as youth who responded to a similar question in a survey of Surrey teens conducted in 1990. In this study, 46.3% reported that they had $10 or less to spend on leisure per week. Both surveys indicate that recreational and leisure programs have to be affordable if they are to attract a broad cross section of young people.

Finally, participants were concerned that young parents have very few options for recreation and even less money. They suggested that child-minding services be offered by recreation centres for these young parents.

Money spent on leisure activities per week:

Up to $5	**22.57%**
$6 - $10	**23.76%**
$11 - $20	**23.37%**
$21 - $30	**12.67%**
Over $30	**14.85%**
No answer	**2.18%**

(*Youth as a Solution: A Basis for Discussion*, Surrey Youth Task Force, 1991)[63]

"Not enough access to inexpensive recreation. . ."

-participant in Nanaimo

"Nowhere to go for cheap. . . "

- participant in Kelowna

"Not enough places for youth to go. . . they're always busted."

- participant in Nanaimo

RECOMMENDATIONS:

3.01 Municipalities should establish youth councils or youth advisory committees which provide advice to parks and recreation departments on youth recreation services including programming, locations, publicity, hours and transportation.

3.02 In cooperation with local health units, substance abuse prevention agencies, and the Ministries of Health and Social Services, youth centres should provide resources such as community health nurses, nutritionists, counselling, outreach services for street youth, immigrant youth, runaways, and abused children, and other services for youth.

3.03 Youth centres should spearhead the development of youth newsletters which would highlight activities and services for youth in the community.

3.04 Municipal councils should work together with youth advisory committees to address the issue of skateboarding in their community. Possible solutions might include construction of skateboard parks and creation of policies which permit skateboarding in designated areas.

3.05 Youth input should be sought on public transit issues to ensure that their transportation needs are met.

"Youth need to get involved and take an active part in organizing and running these programs."

- participant in Fort St. John

COMMUNITY AND YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Without the active involvement of parents, businesses, local governments, community agencies and groups and young people, youth centres and other recreation programs will not serve their youth populations adequately. No youth programming can be entirely self-funding if it is truly to serve all young people. It is often those youth who most need the services available in a centre who can least afford to pay the real cost of providing them.

PREVENTION OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Youth centres can play an important role in preventing mental health problems. They can build life-long habits of active living. They encourage the development of healthy attitudes, self-esteem, and productive use of one's time.

When one looks at the long-term social and economic impacts of dropping out of school, mental and physical health problems, substance abuse, and criminal behavior, it is in society's best interests to provide preventive programs.

ROLE OF MUNICIPALITIES

Municipalities already provide recreation services in their broadest sense to seniors and other age groups. It is only logical that the benefits of sound recreation programming be made available to youth as well. Cities are constantly under pressure from malls and businesses to get youth off the streets; enforcement of bylaws will only move the problem around, not solve it.

Local governments sometimes say that the services they provide are undersubscribed; why should they provide any more? As shown by the examples presented in this section, cost-effective, popular youth programming can be run if youth are given the opportunity for input into decision-making. Youth could gain both an understanding of city government, and work on developing effective youth recreation services.

PROVISION OF OTHER YOUTH SERVICES

In addition to the social benefits of the recreation programs themselves, youth centres are logical places to provide other youth services. It makes sense to bring health, drug and alcohol abuse counselling, job search and other services to youth where they already are and feel comfortable. To do this, youth centres or youth recreation programs need the active cooperation of health departments, alcohol and drug agencies, streetworkers, employment counsellors, nutritionists, and family support workers.

A Step in the Right Direction ...

Blanshard Teens earn California camping trip

Soon, seven Blanshard teenagers will "hit the road." The youth, aged 13 to 17, are members of the Blanshard Community Centre's Teen Work Crew.

During the past year, they've raised approximately $6,000, all of it tagged for a trip to California. On July 23, the group takes two vans on an 18-day camping trip which will include a visit to Magic Mountain in Valencia, a stay in Anaheim, and visits to Disneyland, Universal Studios and Hollywood.

"They sell cords of firewood, for $125 delivered and stacked, and hold car washes to raise funds," said centre youth worker Terri Dorey, one of three adults chaperoning the trip. "They do a lot of hard work - fundraising year-round. It's interrupted for the trip but resumes immediately."

Crew memberships are free, but all members help raise money during the year. For the trip, they need only to bring spending money. Everything else is paid for on a point system, with credits awarded for work done in the program.

"It was set up to provide work experience for the youths, and to help them realize a long-term goal," Dorey explained.

To participate in Teen Work Crew, youths must be between 13 and 18 years old, must stay in school and must keep out of trouble with the law.

"As long as they meet those requirements, they can go on crew trips," Dorey said. "For one kid, this will be the fourth year."

This is the Teen Work Crew's 12th major trip. Smaller ventures have included ski trips and visits to Vancouver hockey games.

New members are accepted each September. For information, call Dorey at 388-7696.

(Reprinted with permission from The Victoria Star, July 8, 1992.)[64]

ROLE OF YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The role of youth members on centre advisory committees should include: input into the creation of rules and their enforcement, suggestions for changes to existing programs, ideas for new programming directions, and assistance with the planning of events. In addition, advisory committee members and youth volunteers can assist in fundraising, act as program leaders and peer helpers, help publicize programs and activities and assist with conducting events.

ROLE OF BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Businesses also have a role to play in assisting with sponsorship of programs, advertising, and donating equipment. Employers could serve resource persons for employment seminars and other events. They benefit from reduced problems with youth on the street, more motivated youth who stay in school, and healthy, active, potential employees.

In turn, youth centres can assist the community by running community events, volunteering, and undertaking other activities. For example, business areas could collaborate with a youth centre or youth group in a project to have street theatre performed in the area. Youth would benefit by having

employment and gaining work experience; businesses would benefit by attracting customers to the area at a relatively low cost.

COLLABORATION WITH SCHOOLS

Greater collaboration is needed between schools, recreation departments, neighbourhood houses, and other private recreation providers (e.g. Boys and Girls Clubs, YM/YWCAs). These agencies are all partners in the the provision of youth recreation services. Ideally a youth committee could advise providers of service on a community-wide basis. If this is not feasible, then regular meetings should take place between these providers to ensure coordination and avoid duplication.

Collaborative arrangements for sharing of facilities have already been discussed. Other resources can also be shared. Recreation leaders can be resources to school programs or other community agencies. In turn, school students or agency employees could provide peer counselling, carry out volunteer activities or work placements, and raise community awareness of youth issues.

Greater liaison with schools will benefit recreation centres through promotion of their programs. Both schools and recreation centres will benefit by inviting the community into their buildings and programs, and by reaching out to the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

3.06 **Municipalities should lead the way in bringing together schools, non-profit agencies which provide recreation services, and other organizations in order to encourage better collaboration in the provision of youth recreation services.**

"[Adults] ask for our opinions, but I think they just ask to make it look good. . . no student opinions have been acted upon."

- participant in Kelowna

NOTES

1. Alcohol and Drug Programs, *1990 British Columbia Student Drug Use Survey: Summary Report.* Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, (Feb. 1992): 8.

2. Alcohol and Drug Programs, 10.

3. Ibid., 9.

4. Ibid.

5. Office of Health Promotion, "Respecting Who You Are", *Health Promotion in Action.* Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, (Spring 1992): 7.

6. "Articles", *B.C. Alliance Concerned with Early Pregnancy and Parenthood.* Vancouver Y.W.C.A., (Spring 1990): 22.

7. Vital Statistics Division, *Vital Statistics and Health Status Indicators, 1990 Annual Report.* Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors. (1990): 42.

8. B.C. Youth Council, "Staging Reality: Young Moms Reveal The Facts", *B.C. Youth.* (Winter 1990-91): 1.

9. Radford, Joyce L.; King, Alan J.C.; Warren, Wendy K., *Street Youth & AIDS.* Kingston: Queen's University Press, (1989): 75.

10. Radford, 86.

11. Goldnerd, Elliot, telephone conversation with the Eating Disorder Resource Centre, Vancouver, B.C., (20 July 1992).

12. Office of Health Promotion, "Healthy food choices", *Healthy Schools Update.* Ministry of Health and Ministry of Responsible for Seniors, (Spring 1992): 2.

13. King, Alan, J.C.; Coles, Beverly, *The Health of Canada's Youth: Views and Behaviours of 11-, 13 and 15-year-olds from 11 countries.* Ottawa: Ministry of National Health and Welfare, (1992): 77.

14. Ney, Tara; Tonkin, Roger, "What About Me?", *Healthier Youth.* Vol. 2, No.5, (Nov. 1991 - Jan. 1992): 3.

15. King, 68.

16. Office of Health Promotion, "Coping with stress", *Healthy Schools Update.* Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, (Spring 1992): 12.

17. Tuk, T.A.P.; Macdonald, J.M., "Suicide Deaths in British Columbia", *Quarterly Digest.* Vol. 1, No. 4, B.C. Division of Vital Statistics, (1991): 18.

18. B.C. Division of Vital Statistics, Suicide, Native Indians. (1989): FAX.

19. Ney, 4.

20. Office of Health Promotion, "Role modeling for conflict resolution", *Healthy Schools Update*. Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, (Spring 1992): 7.

21. Dyck, Angela, information on Youth Mediation Centre, Surrey, B.C. (6 July 1992): FAX.

22. Trevethan, Shelley, "Teenage Victims of Violent Crime", *Juristat Service Bulletin*. Vol. 12, No. 6, Ottawa: Centre for Justice Statistics, Statisitics Canada, (March 1992): 5,6.

23. Blackwell, Judith; Jones-Farrow, Hilary, *One hit leads to another Study Guide*. Victoria: The Victoria Women's Transition House, (1991), 7.

24. Research and Statistics Group, *Canadian Urban Victimization Survey: Victims of Crime*. Ministry of Solicitor General, (1983): 3.

25. Conway, Joan, "Female Young Offenders, 1990-91", *Juristat Service Bulletin*. Vol. 12, No. 11, Ottawa: Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada, (May 1992): 1.

26. Research and Statistics Group, 3.

27. Walker, Tom, *Children and Youth in the Region: What does the future hold?* Social Planning and Research Council of B.C., (Sept. 1991)

28. Clarke, Michelle; Hooper, Sarah; Malette, Jean; Munro, Lauchlan T., "Youth In Canada: A Statistical Profile", *Youth Policy Today*. Vol. 3, No. 4, (Winter 1989): 1-60.

29. Trevethan, 1.

30. Ibid.

31. B.C. Youth Council, "The SCAR of Rioting", *B.C. Youth*. (Spring 1992): 1.

32. Statistics Canada, *1986 Census - Selected Characteristics: British Columbia*.

33. Rivers and Associates Consultants, *Settlement Services For Immigrant Children A Needs Assessment*. Ministry of Provincial Secretary and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Immigration, (October 1991): 23.

34. Ministry of Education, *Annual Report July 1, 1990 to June 30, 1991*. Province of British Columbia, (1991): 30.

35. Ministry of Education, 29.

36. Office of Health Promotion, "Multi-cultural approach to food preparation", *Healthy Schools Update*. (Spring 1992): 14-15.

37. Based on news releases and newsletters issued by the Vancouver Youth Theatre, 1991-92.

38. Posterski, Donald; Bibby, Reginald, *Canada's Youth "Ready for Today" A Comprehensive Survey of 15-24 Year Olds.* Ottawa: Canadian Youth Foundation, (1987).

39. Lafleur, Brenda, *Dropping Out: The Cost to Canada.* The Conference Board of Canada, (1992):

40. Ministry of Education, 33.

41. Ibid., 34.

42. Murphy Campbell, Helen; Cool, Julie, *Dropping Out and Dropping In A Study of Youth and Literacy.* Ottawa: Canadian Youth Foundation, (1991): 43.

43. B.C. Youth Council, "Planning Your Career With Peers", *B.C. Youth.* (Winter 1990-91): 4.

44. Ministry of Edcuation, 53.

45. Murphy Campbell, 41.

46. B.C. Youth Council, "Reaching the Summit", *B.C. Youth.* (Summer 1991): 3.

47. B.C. Youth Council, "Bird's Eye View Bella Coola Country", *B.C. Youth.* (Winter 1990-91): 5.

48. Ministry of Education, 48, 49.

49. Price Waterhouse, *Qualitative Research On School Leavers Summary Final Report.* Ottawa: Statistics Canada, (Dec. 1990): 4.

50. King, 85.

51. B.C. Youth Council, "H.A.P. Empowers Nanaimo Students", *B.C. Youth.* (Winter 1991-92): 1.

52. Posterski, 24,25.

53. Office of Health Promotion, "How to communicate effectively", *Healthy Schools Update.* Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, (Spring 1992): 9.

54. Office of Health Promotion, "Teen Mums take high school honours", *Health Promotion in Action.* Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, (Spring 1992): 6.

55. Office of Health Promotion, "Port Coquitlam Has Hot Line To Teen Recreation Needs", *Health Promotion in Action.* Ministry of Health and Ministry Responsible for Seniors, (Spring 1992): 4-5.

56. City of White Rock, *Community Share Forum for Youth Report.* (June 1991), 12.

57. These figures were compiled based on information from the, Participant Evaluation forms, completed at the end of each of the eight forums.

58. Zahara, Dennis. Letter to B.C. Youth Council, 26 June 1992.

59. Manson, Garry. Reports submitted by Club Metro Burnaby, to the B.C. Youth Council during October 1991 and March 1992.

60. Blair, Dave; Leclerc, Sylvain; Pierce, Lisa; Runte, Shirley; Langham, Barb; Strausz, Pam; Yuen, Julius, *Youth As a Solution: A Basis for Discussion Preliminary Report Needs Assessment Data.* Surrey Community Resource Society (March 1991): Appendix A43.

61. Mayor's Committee on Youth, *Youth Matters.* Report to the City of Prince George, (November 1989): 39.

62. These figures were based on information compiled from the, Participant Evaluation forms, completed at the end of each of the eight forums.

63. Blair, Appendix A53.

64. "Blanshard teens earn California camping trip", *The Victoria Star.* (8 July 1992): 1.

PARTICIPANT ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

Similar to the Canadian Unity forums, the organizers did not limit attendance to individuals between the ages of 15 and 24, even though this group was the target audience. It was hoped that a wide variety of youth would be in attendance at the forums. In almost all of the categories the participant breakdown demonstrates the complexity and diversity of youth in B.C.

In order to establish a profile of the kind of person who attended, information was gathered about the participants: age, gender, residence, and whether they were employed or a student.

ATTENDANCE

It was anticipated during the planning phase that the average attendance at the forums would be 40 to 50 people, with higher attendance in the metropolitan areas. Generally, the response to the forums was very positive, with numbers ranging from a low of six to a high of eighty-two, and overall average attendance figure of forty-three. Total attendance at the forums was three hundred and forty four.

This positive turnout is perhaps partially due to the content of the forums, which were intended to give youth the opportunity to voice their concerns and ideas around issues affecting them. Furthermore, this same content may also have created the very low turnout amongst the 19 to 24 old age group. This is perhaps due to the fact that the areas of youth recreation and education, two prevalent topics at the forums, are no longer significant issues for this older youth category.

First, this group has reached the age of majority in which they can attend most, if not all adult functions and activities, and their high school years are often far enough behind them as to play a negligible role in their lives. As well, this age group is more likely to be employed in a full-time job and therefore unable to attend the weekday forums.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS BY LOCATION

CITY	ATTENDEES
Fort St. John	19
Chilliwack	82
Kelowna	45
Nanaimo	65
Cranbrook	16
Prince George	42
Prince Rupert	6
Vancouver	69

AGE OF PARTICIPANTS

Although all of the advertising for the forums was targeted at youth between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four years old, no one older or younger was excluded from participating. Although there was a great range in the ages of participants, fully sixty three percent were between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. The single largest group attending the forums was fifteen years old, or seventeen per cent of the total number of participants.

AGE OF PARTICIPANTS

AGE	ATTENDEES
12<	6
13	13
14	31
15	57
16	50
17	46
18	35
19	17
20	5
21	10
22	2
23	2
24	4
25>	40
Total	318
Unknown	26

GENDER REPRESENTATION

With the exception of one forum, nowhere did the level of male participation equal that of female participation. In total, males accounted for 32% of the participants and females for 68% (see fig.1 and 2, page 102).

"Everyone was friendly and easy to talk to and finally we could talk to people that actually want to hear what we have to say."

- participant in Chilliwack

Everyone got an opportunity to share [ideas] - it was very 'youth' run."

- participant in Nanaimo

"A catalyst to allow concerned people to voice their opinions."

- participant in Ft.St. John

STATUS: EMPLOYED OR STUDENT

As was already indicated, the forums were successful in attracting youth mainly between fourteen and eighteen years of age. Therefore, it is perhaps not suprising that almost three quarters (73.5%) of participants were students and 23.5% were employed. Both of these groups were comprised of a very diverse cross section of the population.

Amongst the high precentage of students, there were youth participating in a variety of employment and education programs, including the Work Orientation Workshop (W.O.W.) and Youth Employment Skills, Canada (Y.E.S.). There were also youth who had dropped out of high school, youth on probation, peer counsellors and street youth. The reason for much of this diversity can be attributed to the notification of youth workers and counsellors through direct mailings.

Those that were employed were most often teachers, youth workers or counsellors who accompanied youth to the forums. The remaining 3% were participants who failed to indicate whether they fell into either category.

RURAL & URBAN PARTICIPATION

The Council was also concerned whether the young people who attended the forums were representative of the youth population as a whole, in terms of their distribution between rural and urban areas. In virtually all of the forums participants came from a host of communities within each region.

The Vancouver and Prince George forums are excellent examples in which participants came not only from within these large urban regions, but also from places such as Pemberton, Squamish, Sechelt, in the case of Vancouver, and Granisle, McBride and Smithers for Prince George.

Other smaller communities were also represented including: Port Simpson, Charlie Lake, Jaffary, Lytton, Westbank, and Sooke.

ETHNICITY

Although no objective data is available, the forum moderators, facilitators and Council Administrator observed a broad range of ethnic backgrounds amongst forum participants.

However, while the ethnic backgrounds at the forums were diverse, it did not appear to be in keeping with the actual proportion of the youth population.

This was particularly the case at the Vancouver forum. Despite target mailings and follow-up phone calls to such places as the OASIS W.O.W. program, Y.M.C.A. Immigrant Services and others, the multicultural flavour of the Lower Mainland was not as apparent at the forum as had been

hoped. This is in direct contrast to last years Canadian Unity forums which attracted a higher level of visible minorities and immigrant youth. It is not clear if this years forum content based on youth issues prevented such people from attending.

A positive exception to this was the level of First Nations youth who participated at the forums.

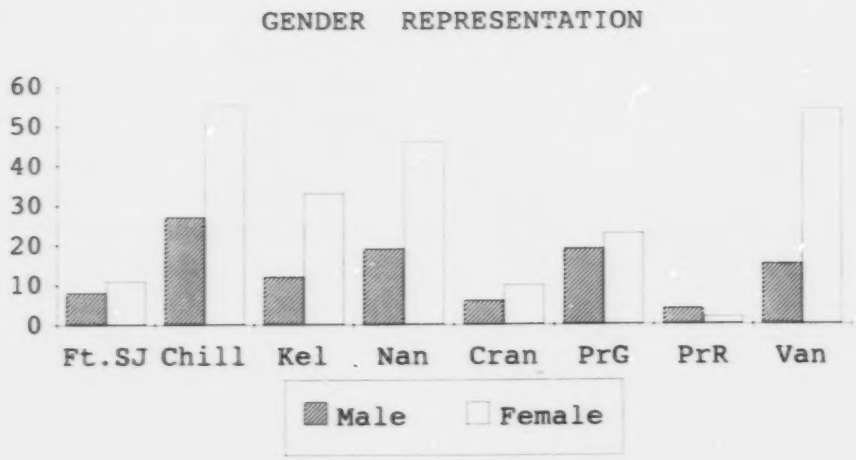
In the case of Nanaimo and Prince Rupert the turnout resulted in twelve out of sixty-five (18%) and four out of six (60%) youth, respectively, coming from native backgrounds. This is most likely the result of mailings and follow-up phone calls to Native Friendship Centres and a variety of native bands.

fig. 1

GENDER REPRESENTATION

	MALE	FEMALE
Ft.St. John	8	11
Chilliwack	27	55
Kelowna	12	33
Nanaimo	19	46
Cranbrook	6	10
Prince George	19	23
Prince Rupert	4	2
Vancouver	15	54

fig. 2



PARTICIPANT EVALUATION

An integral part of carrying out any event is to gather feedback from the participants about the strengths and weaknesses of the process used. Each of the participants was asked to complete a questionnaire which was included in his/her forum kit. The form asked questions about the format of the day, what they felt had been the most and least valuable of the days experiences. A period was designated near the end of the day to complete these forms. Of the three hundred forty-four participants who attended the forums, two hundred seventy-two (79%) completed the evaluation form. The evaluation was divided into eleven questions which resulted in the following information and comments from the participants.

1. What were the major strengths and weaknesses of the structure of the forum?

Participants cited a wide variety of things that they enjoyed at the forums. Generally, it was agreed that the forum structure was well organized and administered. The vast majority were pleased with how both the morning and afternoon sessions allowed youth to honestly discuss issues important to them. The small group discussions further allowed effective communication and the sharing of ideas amongst youth.

"Provides an excellent opportunity for youth to 'put it on the table.'"

- participant in Chilliwack

"I liked how we talked in a group. I was able to open up and talk and give ideas."

- participant in Chilliwack

"I was listened to; my vote counted."

- participant in Vancouver

The single most commonly heard weakness was the time frames used at the forums. Several participants often felt rushed, particularly in the morning sessions. They agreed that there was insufficient time to discuss many of the issues they raised in more detail. Part of the problem lay with the reporting method used, which required all groups to report back to everyone on their findings. A number of people indicated that this mechanism of reporting to the large groups was sometimes repetitive.

2. What were the most/least valuable parts of day for you?

Hearing ideas and opinions of youth from different parts of the province was the most valuable experience for many of the participants. They felt that bringing together people and ideas was an ideal way to facilitate understanding and action on a common set of issues.

Here too, however, was the concern raised over the repetitive nature of the large group discussions. Many felt that having the small groups findings presented to everyone was important, but that such a process should be organized so as to reduce the level of repetition between the groups.

3. Did you feel that you had an adequate opportunity to express your opinions? Why or why not?

Of the two hundred fifty-three people who responded to this question, two hundred thirty-eight (94%) felt that the small group format was an

"[These are] serious issues facing this nation today and must be recognized."

- participant in Ft.St. John

excellent way to allow all people to express their views. This was true of people who were shy and those who were perhaps less articulate. Several participants indicated how such a small group structure allowed them to speak honestly and be listened to by other members of the group.

4. Did you feel you had enough time to complete the tasks put before you? Why or why not?

Again, the majority, or one hundred sixty-four (64%) of the two hundred fifty-three people who responded to this question, indicated that they had been given sufficient time to complete the tasks put before them.

The eighty-nine respondents who felt that there had been insufficient time, still offered several constructive comments. Many argued that they had been able to raise many issues, but that they would have liked more time to discuss these issues in detail. As well, while the small group discussions sometimes got off topic, most felt that the knowledge gained was valuable and worthwhile.

5. Did the time the forum was held pose a problem for you?

Last year's Canadian Unity forums, which were held during the summer holidays, appeared to be a contributing factor for the relatively low turnout. For this reason the 1992 Youth Talks were held during the month of May. For two hundred thirty-five (91%) of the two hundred fifty-seven respondents to this question, this time period presented few difficulties. However, a significant minority of youth did feel that even this time frame was too close to their high school final exams. It was suggested that the weeks following the April spring break, might be more appropriate.

6. What could the Council do to improve attendance at similar forums in the future?

By far and away the most often heard suggestion was to increase the level of advertising for future youth forums. This could be achieved

"We had plenty of time to talk about what we needed; it was a very successful day."

- participant in Ft.St. John

through the solicitation of a larger number of schools, both public and private, and advertisements in community newspapers. It was also suggested that guest speakers be included in the morning introduction. These guest speakers would hopefully be from local law enforcement, schools, city council and/or health services.

7. Do you think that holding forums with youth on school dropout, recreation/leisure opportunities for youth and other issues is worthwhile?

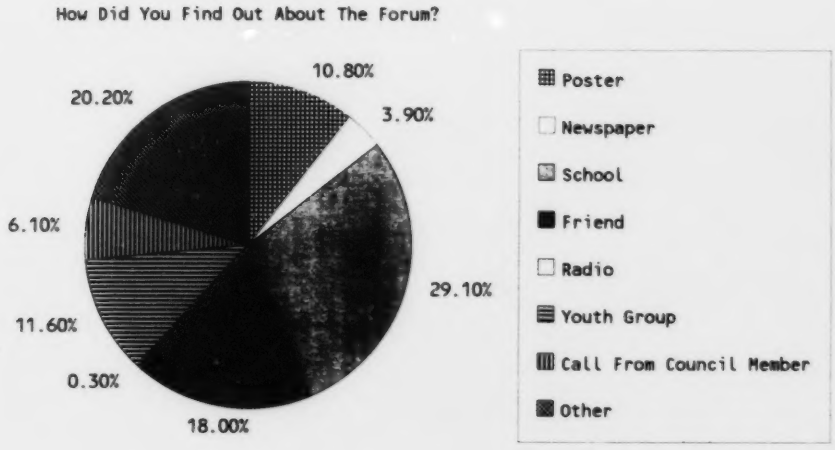
Of the two hundred fifty-seven people responding to this question, two hundred and fifty (97%) saw the forums as a valuable medium for addressing youth issues. For many it was an opportunity to express their thoughts to government and to develop a sense of involvement and purpose. They understood that the well being of this Province and Canada depends upon youth.

8. How did you find out about the forum?

Out of the two hundred fifty-eight respondees, approximately 35% found out about the forums through their schools. Other sources, which included direct mail, family member(s), or Regional Youth Committees were the next best source for youth to learn about the forums, drawing almost 25% of attendees. Friends were a close third, attracting 22% of the youth who participated in the forums. Youth groups, posters, telephone calls from the B.C. Youth Council, newspapers and the radio were the sources which notified the remaining 13%, 12%, 7%, 4%, and 0.3% respectively about the upcoming forums for youth.

The results to questions nine and eleven, which dealt with how youth use their leisure time and the amount of money they can afford to spend on all recreational and leisure activities per month, have been included in the section on **Recreation/Leisure Opportunities**.

Fig. 2



10. What services or programs would change what you do now?

Most of the responses to this question modeled those found in the section on recreation and leisure. Those responses included: youth centres, improved times and access to existing recreation facilities, affordable and improved public transportation, inexpensive recreation activities, and in general, locations that youth can interact and socialize in safely.

Although the reasons are not readily apparent, several youth expressed misunderstanding about this question and were unable to respond.

Queen's Printer for British Columbia©
Victoria, 1992